

Ondell and Dolee



A STORY OF MYSTICISM

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ONDELL AND DOLEE

A Story of Mysticism

BY

JOSIAH GROSS



THE

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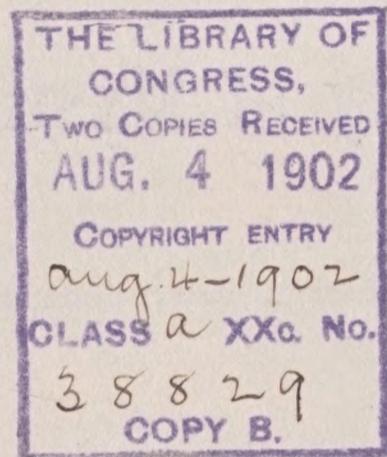
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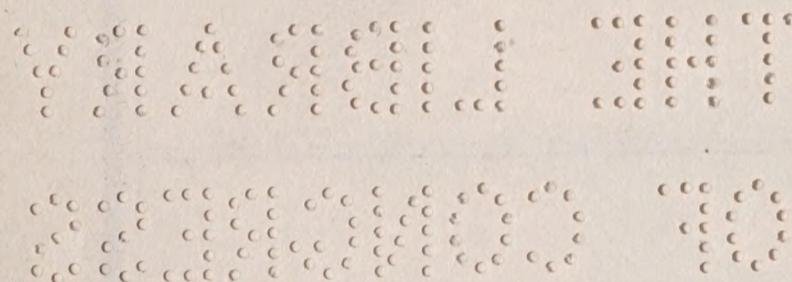


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TO MY FRIEND
DR. JOSEPH L. BRUNET

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ONDELL AND DOLEE

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN DOCTOR TANTON TORQUAY AND MISS DOLEAH ANTIETH HAVE A QUARREL AND INCIDENTALLY DISCUSS ONDELL URMODEN.

In the shadow of fragrant trees, a forest of cupressus, of pellate cones and deep-hued leaf, by the massive oaks that joined the hickory in the deepening of the shade, rode Doleah Antieth, the belle of a modern Gascony. A ripple of song came from her lips, the scenes of evening, the orange tints of a dying sun, all as beautiful as some rarely tinted aquarelle, rested in the western sky, the shadows reached across the highway of deep red iron permeated soil and the peace of a coming sleep had thrown its spell over the country.

Hard behind, though hitherto unobserved by her, rode Tanton Torquay, the country doctor, a man not unpleasant to the senses, a man seemingly passion-hearted, though in a mild degree deep and peculiar in his manner. His was such a personality as appealed to the physical sense, his fascinations were several and his mind and his body seemed alike powerful and stealthily rapid in action and while one deeply skilled in character might fancy that he saw therein something sinister, yet to the average person he displayed a flattering geni-

ality and a winsomeness rare to the male twin of humanity.

“Good evening, Miss Dolee, my dear little friend, your voice is like the honey dew of morning. As you sang so plaintively and so sadly you turned my heart to other days.”

Quite surprised from her reverie, Dolee turned, partly in anger, to meet his unflinching eyes, as blue and as tender as the midday sky.

“You are quite at home in the art of interruption, Doctor, the road is wide and I prefer this side of it to myself.”

“Indeed! Then I shall be well content with the other side. May I ride in your vicinity,—in your circumjacency?”

To this she gave him no answer, but he smiled and maintained the farther side of the road.

“Dolee, my dear friend,” he began after a while and with less of a taunt in his voice, “since my earliest recollection, since fawning boyhood, I have known you but to admire you. And in other years I was foolish enough to believe that you cared for me a little,—that was in the days of nevermore. You will at least oblige me if you will put off that look of scorn and let an old-time warmth kindle your heart. Even though you have ceased to love me,—I love you,—I love you.”

“You are the personification of conceited impudence. Ride on and do not speak to me. We have of love and friendship taken leave and not again, by any working of your subtle arts, can you weave again your web of flattery around my trustful heart.”

"Oh, my,—is it that bad?" he asked with a slight accent of disdain.

"Yes,—you are well known here and your qualifications have ceased to commend themselves to me, so let that be the end of it."

"Good! Then I am not needed in your business. You are a bright girl, Dolee, and as sweet as a peach! Oh, my, yes!" And Tanton smirked with satisfaction at his sally.

"Leave me, Doctor Tanton!"

"With regret. With regret. But why may we not talk, since we ride the same road? It will be company for both, assuredly for me."

"We shall inevitably quarrel, Doctor Tanton, so ride on and let me see how swift a steed you support."

"Rather no. I am not interested in having you care for me in that way. Let us quarrel then in the good old-fashioned way, I want to tell you something about your latest amatory acquisition, our mutual horror, Ondell Urmoden."

"I will not hear it."

"Yes, you will," he replied, impudently stubborn, for he was not easily put down and his serene composure was by this time more or less ruffled. It was a fault with Tanton, that he soon became, in every bout, what is popularly known as "rattled."

"Dolee!" he commanded in a tone so fierce that she was for a moment startled, since she was easily subjective to the art of awakening tragic emotion. "You shall carry in your heart to the end of your days, the image of my face. I have known the bondage of your

love and not all of its sunshine has departed from me. Once,—in the frosts of an autumn there came a sad deflection in our souls, and——”

“Your dear soul,—how it worries you. Bah, Tanton Torquay of Gascony, how humorously you put it.”

“I declare, yes. But,—no matter. Divinest Dolee,—I have never been made acquainted with the wherefore of your actions. Would you be gracious enough,—in your natural kindness of heart,—to enlighten me, so that my heart as well as my honor may be satisfied?”

Dolee laughed as she looked at him across the road. Then she was silent and then laughed again.

“Laughing at my honor, I suppose? I can read your thoughts because I know your style. You think men have no honor,—not natural to them. Come now and enlighten my heart,—honor or no honor.”

“Your honor has never been burnt at the stake, Tanton Torquay, and you need not ask me why I have **no** regard for you. You know.”

“Really,—I am at your service. Since you insist that I know, I cannot question the assertion of a lady. But,—but,—of course, that particular cell colony has gone to the bottom of the heap and while, of course, I know, I am not conscious of all that I do know, just at this moment. Would you mind refreshing me,—let me see,—just precisely how did it all happen?”

“You are absolutely unique in your impudence. One must admire that at least. Could you possibly awaken to the memory,—after an intervening year,—that once upon a day I gave you a promise of marriage?” Dolee laughed bitterly as she said this.

Tanton and Dolee Quarrel. 11

"Ah, yes,—yes. An inimitable bit of coquetry, no doubt."

"Indeed not. I was younger then and I was sincere. I was foolish enough to be sincere. It gives me headache to think of it now."

"Yes, it must be distressing. And so much your own fault too. I was as honest with you as I could be. I was never in my life so honest about anything."

"A severe spasmodic symptom, as doctors will say, I must confess to an admiration of your wit."

"Please don't mention it,—though I adore the keen penetration of your genial humor, my little lady,—and as you are a lady, I cannot question,—I was honest with you."

"Yes, you were an idle boy then, a country swain blessed with a shock head, an empty brain and several Reuben-like attributes. I was an innocent girl and in my innocence I gave you my heart and lived to regret it."

"We are not so,—how was that? Oh, yes,—Reuben like and innocent now, are we?"

"No, thank God, we are riper now. I gave you a pearl fairer than adorned any lace that you shall ever again behold and you threw it, like a worthless pebble into the Bourbese. Then you wandered into the court-yards of the great cities and filled your head with learning and with sin. You fell into the ways of women and passed your tiny heart around. You loved them all and when fate was good enough to put one of your soilings into my way,—indeed,—it was truly from Eloine Terren that I learned of the ways of my hitherto adorable Tanton. Bah,—it is a tiresome business."

"Yes, he turned out badly,—poor fellow," sighed the doctor with one of his matchless bits of irony that was yet devoid of offense. It was not easy to get away from one as insinuating as Doctor Torquay; he stuck to you as with tendrils and usually not unpleasantly. But he could be like the fish that empties its ink into the sea, making all his surroundings black and sending the other denizens coughing and scurrying off to a clearer aquasphere,—it all depended when and where the mood took him.

"Then you came home to empty out the glitter of your brain, for heart and soul you had none. I remember that your love letters were well edited,—I read in them words of intense, sacred foolery,—in fact,—as I remember,—there were two of a kind, as intense as a hypocrite could make them,—they might have been letter press copies, one for me and the other for Eloine,—that was the level upon which you had the impudence to put me. You might, at least, have had the consideration or taken the time and trouble to have written two distinct letters," and she laughed bitterly, for indeed, of all her memories, this was the most unpalatable of all.

"Then I am to infer, that yours was merely a case of wounded vanity because you did not get an wholly original piece of literature from me. Had I only known that!"

Dolee was stung by this and for a moment lost her equipoise, which was ordinarily above the average.

NOTE.—*Aquasphere*. The water sphere in which a fish lives.

"You are a serpent and I heed you as I would a serpent!"

He looked at her with well-feigned surprise. "My dear Dolee——"

"Don't dare to repeat it!" she retorted fiercely, and for the succeeding moment or two, he was impassively silent.

"Ah, well," he said finally, with a sigh, that for perfect acting was cast upon far too narrow a stage. "Then it is beyond our words. Since what I say cannot avail to clear away the deep set doubts that fill your troubled hours, neither can what I hear from you ease the pain I feel. Of course, I have my faults and I have made mistakes, but you will hardly expect me to be an angel until sometime after my death,—will you?" From the sigh of an apparently utter despair, this facile man had through the mirror of a few words looked into the merry world of mirth,—laughing softly as if to further exasperate his unwilling companion.

"I do not relish this trifling, and unless you see fit to ride on, I shall turn back. You are taking advantage of me to insult me and Mr. Urmoden will call you to account for this."

"That cowardly shrimp! I beg your pardon. That I retract,—that, I did not mean to say. But let me tell you,—since you speak of him and though, after a fashion, I respect him,—this man Urmoden is a strange set man for one of his years. His nature is too cold and deep for you, Miss Dolee."

"Yes, perhaps. But he is not like you,—cold, vindictive and desperate. There is a difference."

"Oh, yes, decidedly so. I am frank, open hearted, self contained if you will, but this man has a scowling face like an Indian, he is taciturn, gloomy, savage,—a mental cannibal,—that is his nature. He is as dumpy as his gloomy vaults, where they say the ghosts of ancient men keep house. His jaws set hard, as though his teeth have need of the strengthening, such as hard pressure gives. But I mean no disparagement upon all that. I mean that his mind is curved, that is, that his thoughts are not straight out,—crooked, dishonest, if you will,—I notice that you were about to put the question, so I answer it. You see, my intuition is in prime condition. I know him long and well,—better than you can ever know him,—I meet him on the same level,—though I confess that it is difficult for one to know these alchemists, who fancy that they dabble into magic of all colors. Pshaw ! here is a man who dreams by day and in the stretches of the night woos up, by incantations of harmony, the shades of the silent world,—a dabbler into devachan,—a glorious husband that!"

To this strange speech, Doleah Antieth had given attention, for it was rife in the neighborhood that Ondell was more than mysterious in his habits. He lived alone and in so queer a habitation and he was so unduly mirthful over the whole of their gentle accusations that the country folk were sure that if there was witchcraft anywhere that it was at the Mansion of a Thousand Stairs.

"You believe that he loves you," continued the irrepressible Tanton, determined to empty out his spleen despite the drawback of an unwilling and unsympa-

thetic listener, "pshaw, that man has other loves,—loves that chain the imagination and have enduring charms,—they never fade as you may fade," and Tanton looked at her so hard that even across the road in the shades of bright evening she fancied that he looked through her and pointed out each charm that would in time fade and named the hour when he would rejoice at the fleeting wantonness of all things that are, her cheeks tingled under his searching eye,—his cold, beefy, blue eye that had a knowledge of sensual things beyond the ordinary.

"You are wasting precious forces, you are a dupe to your fond hopes——"

"As once before? Why not have added that?" she asked tauntingly, and the word flew into the heart of a guilty conscience. Tanton was ready for more, after a moment's pause.

"Let me warn you,—beware,—there is a devil lurking there."

"Begone, you idle hypocrite. I hate you for your double dealing. You stab men and women in the dense groves, in the hour when the cloud hangs before the moon; you are too cowardly to go to Ondell and tell him that,—there is a man for you!"

"Oh, yes, you may boast of him, but he is not dangerous; not in the least. When I get through with him, he will be like the kite that has wound up its career in a tree top."

"On the contrary, my braggart, you will bait the minnows at the bottom of the Bourbese, and if you

value the entirety of your anatomy, I advise you to keep your delicate hands from Ondell."

"Oh, thank you ever so much. But, in truth, I have had so much advice in my time, and that which has cost me so much cash, and which I valued at the time more than I do this, that I shall follow my own ideas about that."

"You are a coward and a cur! Thank God, here comes my boy,—just crazy enough to kill you some time."

"Hah! You may chide me and call me cur and hypocrite, and make valentines of my hopes,—I am not the man to loose my tempering. But I will oblige you to the extent of parting from you now. I love you for your charming disdain, and I shall not fail to be around handily at the altar of my adoration. Inform your friend, Sir Ondell, that I am his rival." With a merry laugh, he cantered on leisurely, apparently not caring to bid the time with Philleo, the man servant of Dolee, and, possibly, he was of the opinion that three would be a crowd. For some reason Tanton did not like the rough-hewn Philleo, though in truth, the latter was, most of the time, as harmless a man as lived. He was not given to intellectual perspicacity, but there was neither mildew nor molasses on his wit. He was a rough-and-tumble sort of a fellow, good at a knockdown and dragout, and at the country dances played the fiddle all night execrably. But his fellows took care not to comment upon his musical vagaries in his hearing for fear that a paling might fly off the fence and rap them on the pate.

CHAPTER II.

DOLEAH AND PHILLEO VENT THEIR IDEAS OF FICKLE MEN, AND GERAND INTRODUCES A NOVELTY IN FIREWORKS.

“I am glad you came. Tanton is so tiresome these days,” said Dolee, “he has been abusing Ondell shamefully.”

“Why, blarst his hide, shall I ride him down for you?”

“Oh, no; I’m glad to be rid of him.”

“He showed heel dust when I come round.”

“Was that it?” Dolee laughed, as she always did at Philleo.

“I’m prophet enough to feel round me, sometimes, what’s er goin’ to happen,—like them thar dogs do what live in the earthquake countries,—that’s a bad man; he isn’t fur from the bad place right now,—I’m here to tell you,—and Mister Ondell best to keep his light blazin’ round him.”

“You’re a fool forever strutting on the earth. You need to be squelched.”

“Gee whizzus! Here’s whar I git it in the carbuncle neighborhood. Say, you’re not mad, are you?” he asked, after a moment, when the rebuke had passed from his evanescent nature.

"Yes, I am cross with all the world this evening. I declare I do believe that all men are hypocrites."

"Yessem, all hypocrites are men, jest as you said they was."

Dolee smiled in despite of her moodiness and for several moments Philleo rode along in profound meditation.

"No, I didn't git that out right, Miss Dolee; let me see, I know I'm no hypocrite and I'm a man."

"And a poor excuse, too."

"Wall, that's better'n bein' a wommern. No, no, no, I didn't mean that; I mean it's better to be a nobody-man than to be a man's nobody."

"By which you might mean me?" she laughed.

"Oh, no, no, I didn't git it out right that time, nuther. I mean it's better to be a nobody's nobody than to be somebody's man; no, that might mean me. I think I mean that it's better to be a nobody's somebody——"

"Of course that would mean you," she said merrily.

"Oh, yes, that must mean me," but Philleo was not out of the puzzle garden,—he had an idea of some kind which had tangled itself hopelessly in his mental lariat.

Dolee pursued her own thoughts. "Can it be possible? It seems of late that my lover has much pre-occupation; he thinks of things far off and not of me. How well I remember his former gaiety, especially that day when he fell out of the mulberry tree and almost hit me in his coming. How he lay on the green sward, half ashamed, and how keenly handsome he

appeared to be then. He has become morose and regretful, it seems. He wants interest and enthusiasm. He is like a ship that has gotten into a still wind in the middle of the sea. As for the tale told me by that serpent, such as this was heard once in Paradise; that is, if ancient stories are not ancient,—well, no matter, he is but a sorry tempter. Yet for myself, I feel dissatisfaction, my feelings bring me pain and anxiety. Am I doomed to love in vain? Shall I have a repetition of a former sorrow? Am I not fair? Not true? Who is this man that would make a fool of me?" She had painful memories and her jerky thoughts were cross-grained,—for she had felt bitterness,—and doubt was not without its reasons for being. Her knowledge of human nature was limited too, by a few tokens she tried to interpret many mysteries, and consequently she fell into much error. "Pshaw," she said, half laughing aloud, "one would think that my father kept a notice on the gate that he had a marriageable daughter in the house, and that all are welcome." Yet without having an unchaste imagination, she had doubts, and she exercised a natural right in studying the problem so important to all women.

"It's gettin' dark, Miss Dolee," said Philleo.

"Well, what then?"

"I don't like it to get dark 'round me; this wild country is full of ghosts, and people has been robbed 'long this road."

"You are a coward, Philleo."

"In some things, yes."

"We're going up to Thousand Stair to-night, Philleo."

Her servant gave the characteristic low whistle of surprise. "Don't scare a fellow like that. My face is gettin' wrinkly, ennyhow. You're not shore enough in earnest?"

"Yes, indeed. I am in much doubt of heart, and cannot brook the idle hours that pass along so slumberously. Tanton told me something that I cannot get away from."

"Oh, you mustn't mind him, Miss Dolee."

"I cannot help it. He told me that Ondell was making a fool of me, and I have a fancy to see him to-night and read his mind. If he loves me not——"

"Oh, he loves you,—don't worry, don't fret,—who wouldn't love you?"

"I will know that. I have been close to the fire, and before I get into another——"

"Yes, I do declare, you was shorely burnt at the stake by that feller Tanton."

"And you are quite imprudent,— quite so. It's none of your business."

"Well, all right, it's none of my business. But them ghosts up there is a whole lot of my business. If they gets me, you're not comin' to my infair. I'm glad I got my gun, annyway."

"You'd forget it if you ever got where you'd really need it. You boys who carry guns to picnics, to rear around with and pretend that you are bad men, are not dangerous."

"Well, now, don't never gamble on that thar proper-

sition. I tell you, Miss Dolee, if you ever get into a hoss trade of that kind, you'll find the world full of deceit. I may be harmless, but I'll bear watchin' sometimes."

"You are afraid to go with me because it is dark. I suppose that if you really saw a ghost, we'd bury you the next day."

"Well, all right; if I must, then I go. An' if you'll take the lead a goin', I'll be shore to take it a comin' back."

Dolee was delicately sensitive to her surroundings and ever a prey to her imaginings and vague emotions. Almost a tear drop stood in each eye, but she resolutely held them back. She was not indifferent to the charm of the great passion, and some innate vanity made her spirit rebel at the possible thought that she was not sufficiently beautiful and fascinating to win the heart of man into abject adoration. Perhaps she asked too much. Yet there was no denying her wealth of attraction, that she knew. And many another one thought, too, that there was a deep, hallowed soul beneath those attractions, and the commonplace seemed to stand in awe before her, so that many a countryman sighed and dismissed the possibility as something too rich for his blood. Dolee meant to be honest in every feeling; circumstances only, and apparently those over which she had no control, had made her doubtful,—indifferent and at times unapproachable. Her experience with Tanton had been greatly unpleasant; she had, in youthful ardor, admired this man, and built upon his promises the castles that all maidens will rear,—and

she imagined herself as mistress therein, a loved wife and the heart's fond desire,—alas, how rudely the entrancement had, like a falling frame, broken into bits before her.

Drifting clouds, like errant ghosts into infinity, passed slowly downward with the fading of the vernal sun, into an oppressive silence. The hard stepping of the fiery horses seemed to be the only thing that saved her from the depths of reverie. Darkness now brooded over the distant hills, where slept the daisy and the clover, that had come, earliest of all, to welcome the tardy spring,—a brook flowed evermore down hill and dale,—here, she had often rode alone in other years, in the days, when, even as unto herself, an invisible hand touched every living thing and spurned it to brood and bloom into beauty,—here, she had watched the spring steal on the summer unaware,—here, passed before her, green spring, golden summer, red autumn and ghastly winter, for twenty and two years and it was now time that she turn from bloom and growth and hopes and longings, into a life of reality and of life's fruition. Ondell,—he must not be permitted to deceive her, if he but presumed, however slightly, upon such a thing, she would, at once, cast him from her,—for indeed, there were others. She need not worry with doubtful, distant men, others demanded her,—though, perhaps, they appeared not to be so high born and noble limbed, yet, possibly, as good and in the sum total as desirable as their more pretentious fellows. Such were her thoughts as she rode along the woodland, on the red highway, by the brook that flowed

evermore down hill and dale. They were secret thoughts, such as never, by any hint, beheld the light of day,—had any one, in tenderest intimacy, asked her if she ever had such thoughts as these, she would have tossed off the query as an impertinence.

Thousand Stair Mansion was silhouetted in the distance, its beacon lamp shone out upon the valley from the high hill whereon the house stood, a curious pile of masonry and a scene of silence and of desolation. Not even the contiguity of cultivated fields or the window lights of far off neighboring houses added animation to the scene, with evidences of civilization on every hand, the place yet seemed to stand in the desolation of the forests of a primeval age, such was the peculiar effect of the ensemble of hills, valleys and streams of the country, a likely place for the haunts of wild men of the forests in the days of the aborigine. It was lonely there and the mansion of a Thousand Stairs was a veritable temple of silence. Deeper the crimson suffused the skies and now the forests were hung with draperies of twilight. There was a shadow on the high hill where the forbidding mansion stood and Philleo instinctively shrank from the gloomy places. He had rather face anything than this mansion. His mind had been, since his earliest childhood instilled with superstition, uncanny things occurred there,—it was reputed that strange forms hovered about and cast stones at the hill where the mansion stood,—stones that seemed to appear mysteriously in the sky, having come from,—nobody knew where, and the Methodist minister who had gone there, once upon an

evening, to pray with the devil, had, while kneeling upon a rock and in the full moonlight, where it was possible to see any one that might have been lurking about, been soundly laid out with so unholy a thing as a wooden shoe, which reached him in the small of the back.

The hoot of the owl was heard there, when the singers of the wood were hushed and the flowers had folded from the dew. The air of the Quiogozon was ever there. And it was a curious story that they told. This hill, they said,—who loved to gather by the fire-side and spin yarns,—was hollowed out by a vast cavern and that in the days of long ago, the Indians or the Mound Builders, used it as a temple or a charnel house and some even declared that a wandering rebellious branch of the sun worshipping Natchez had maintained here their perpetual fires and that, in imitation of them, Doctor Urmoden kept his light burning also.

Herein reposed the partial excications of this former race. The opening of this cave was directly to the top of the hill, an aperture, some thirty feet in diameter, descending obliquely into the earth and opening into a vast cave as if it were the cone of a volcano. But such it was not. The opening to the top of the hill had probably been formed by a cave-in of a weak part of the cavern's dome and when Urmoden the elder discovered the place, he became fascinated with it, because it so well represented his insanely gloomy nature.

NOTE.—Quiogozon. Indian term for burial vault.

He had built over this aperture, with solid foundations, the mansion of a Thousand Stairs, built it of the white limestone with which the country abounded and his house had the appearance of beauty and majesty. But time yellowed the whiteness of the stone and the moss grew and the vine hung around and so it was that the sombreness of the tomb had come over it all.

When Doctor Urmoden came to this country with his band of laborers, no one looked on, other than the autochton of the forest. These natives did not relish Urmoden and their dislike took such a form, that they gathered themselves together and moved to the West. They even entertained the idea of a massacre, but something of that feeling that inspired the succeeding white settlers, got into the consciousness of the native and he wished not to go up against it,—whatever it was,—so he moved.

When the house was built, the doctor had the workmen build a stairway down into the cavern and it was said by those who had never counted them, that there were a thousand of the steps and that from this the house was named, as a fact though, there were less than a hundred of them and the name had been given by the people themselves,—Urmoden cared not what they called his house.

What was the influence? Among the mysteries of the world, that will be one of them, the hand and the power of the dead, their influence upon the living, the swiftly moving of humanity towards another and more ancient family, in another state of existence, by which union shall come and wisdom multiply upon the earth,

the dawning of the new cycle, with its splendid mysteries of discovery, and here, the silent, gloomy Urmoden,—one of several of the advance heralds of a new dispensation,—where the evil of the living and the evil that is locked in death, shall be unloosened and redeemed and purified,—here, he lived his life and gave to the world a son that moved in a diametrically opposite direction to that of his own,—such appears to be ever the incongruity of evolution.

It was bruited about, in the contemporary history of this country, that Gerand was some sort of a bandit, at least a wild, reckless fellow with an inquisitive nose and a drooping, reddish mustache. It was told sub rosa that he had once driven off by the light of the milky way, a team of mules belonging to a richer neighbor and had sold them forty miles beyond the territory. The mules were returned, after several legal processes, but Gerand was not successfully identified with the surreptitious transaction. All this might have been unfair to a noble mind and a christian disposition, but somehow, the people never took to Gerand's honesty or hankered after emulating his ways.

Now, whether, Gerand meant to frighten wild animals to death by a new hunting scheme or to scare passers by into such a paralysis that they might be easily lightened of their wealth, or whether he merely meant sport after the fashion of the practical joker or as a further surmise, that possibly Tanton had provided for and inspired the experiment, however it was, Gerand had drilled a hole into a white rock that lay by the road at the foot of the hill, the same, in fact, where

the minister and the wooden shoe came into contact some years previous to this,—and therein he had plugged up powder and provided a fuse.

It is within the bounds of possibility that Gerand wanted some loose rock for next day's uses and that his work had carried him into so late an hour that he had postponed the main thing until next day and that Tanton, aware of the fact that Dolee and Philleo rode after him, had ignited the fuse,—though it is unbelievable that he was anxious for their destruction, it was not his fashion to kill what he wanted, he killed whatever had desires on what he wanted,—therein he was not different from the usual run of criminals. He declared afterwards that he threw away the snipe of his cigar somewhere into the woods and that possibly it had fallen upon the fuse, at any rate, immediately after Philleo, lagging tardily behind Dolee, had passed the spot, there was a deafening roar that momentarily convinced him that the day of judgment had finally arrived.

“Goll blame it!” he exclaimed in terror, “Gosh er mighty, we're lost!”

Dolee herself was terribly shocked and frightened and as she could not understand this and since possibly there might be more trouble in the same direction, she gave free rein to her horse and Philleo plunged madly after her.

CHAPTER III.

ONDELL URMODEN DISCUSSES METAPHYSICS WITH
DALTIL SONDALERE AND INDULGES IN PERSONAL
HISTORY.

Ondell was a striking human curiosity and in much lesser degree, Sondalere was another. Apparently, these companions loved solitude and to delve into the mysteries of personality. They were not cranks, because neither seriously believed in what they studied, they were investigators of phenomena and chronic doubters of all things. They displayed in high degree the bent of mind of modern investigators, that of making sport of the serious problems of life. Cabbage heads, tent shaped heads and heads that backed away in every direction from a common center, queer noses and oyster shell ears, nerve follies of every kind,—nothing was sacred to them. Ondell had an ingrained sarcasm and much of that fictitious wisdom that comes with understanding many things, which, in turn is apt to lead one's mind to believe that it understands all things and yet, his intellect was of the first order,—experience was, at his age, his greatest need. With Sondalere, it was a case of a big head being fuller than a large head and while conceit is often a good thing, he demonstrated to a nicety what self satisfied limitation could do for a man. Ondell, of more ma-

jestic outline had, in some directions fitly taken the measurements of Sondalere and it pleased him to consider, that to know many things is pleasure, but to know nothing, after the standard of his friend, was an infinite delight. That was where his conceit undermined his perceptions, he underrated his friend. Both were young and Sondalere had the appearance of effeminacy but Ondell was of vigorous masculine type. This evening they sat together and when it became dark, they laid aside their cards and resumed their excavation of the wine jug until it was low tide therein. Under this influence, Ondell became more than ordinarily loquacious and it surprised Daltil when his austere and unemotional companion slapped him on the back and asked for a story.

“I prefer to hear from you, Ondell,—you always interest me.”

“Well, perhaps, sometimes I am interesting. Sondalere, I have a friend or two, my heart requires no more and I am glad when they come. Here they find me lonely, a hermit, perhaps a scholar,—who has the audacity to dispute that?” He laughed good humorously.

“Not I, I know that you are a scholar and a rare gentleman.” Ondell knew the speech of his servile and artful friend and he minded not his continuous flattery.

“Here, the cup of peace brims over dolefully and with the unparalleled reputation of my house and so great a curiosity as myself and occasionally yourself,—I ought to chew the cud contentedly, ought I not?”

"Yes, with the exception, however, that all this is not calculated to bring you out socially." The flatterer seemed verily to be in a mood of gentle reproachfulness, "you will be ostracised because of the reputation of your house."

"I have not heretofore noticed it. Ostracised? Come now, a good jest."

"Really, the talk that goes among the gossips that the souls of the dead come here to enact again an hour on earth, is hurting you, this talk of dim wraiths and thin shells of men that are reputed to walk up and down this hill at midnight does you harm with simple folks. A haunted house is a poor recommendation for so fine a gentleman."

"Do you ever see these alleged men in your midnight rambles, friend Sondalere? It is bad form, then is it, to strike up telephone connections with the hereafter? Supposing that it is not true,—not a bit of it? Spook hunters are always finding what they look for, I never hunt any and I know nothing of it. These idle reports amount to nothing and I do not care what they say." Ondell laughed at it.

"Come now, you know more than you care to tell. Your easy manner of throwing off these accusations only tends to fastens them upon you. You are accused of witchcraft and if you had lived a hundred years ago your ears would have been cut off and your tongue slit."

"And you?"

"Same case, of course. Mind you, I do not accuse

you of having souls in cold storage, I am telling you what the public says of you."

"Yes, give a decent old fellow with a good reputation several bad sons-in-law and it will not be long until the old fellow has lost his also. Such is life,—but the modern beatitude is, blessed is he that don't care a snap."

"I do not jest, I am your friend and want you to put yourself right before the people."

"Yarrem! One would suppose that I was running for county collector!"

"No. But you ought to do something to dispel this foolish mystery."

"Oh well, life is short and hades is near, I shall not go about with an accordion pleat between my brows because of worry over a riddle, these alleged ghosts are curiosities, I look upon them as mind freaks and of my own mind at that, I do not believe them other than that they are hallucinations, why then should I trouble myself about them?"

"Honestly?"

"Well of course. I admit that I see strange things, just as one does that is saturated with alcohol. His is intemperance, mine is a nervous malady. No man whose organism is normal ever sees spooks. The nervous and sexually diseased are the only ones. Oh, I have thought it all out, there is nothing in it. When I see the insubstantial thing that calls itself my father,—as you, or any one might have a dream, I am surprised at the intensity of my waking dreams,—merely that. It is a phenomena to be asleep on one side or

the other, with both eyes open and to be able to have dreams and realities transpiring before you at the same moment, but it is merely a phenomena. When I wake up dead some day, then it will be time to believe in the reality of this thing. But not yet."

"I scarcely agree with you. I have not seen these wonders of an unconscious cerebration, but I have an innate superstition that there is form beyond this life and I know that it must be a law that going hence means coming back,—if not, why not?"

"Same old question. How the devil do I know?"

"Then you are not to be persuaded on the kamarupa question?"

"See here, friend Sondalere, I have strayed into the world's large stableyard and fortune has made of me a bloated broomholder, my eyes have become accustomed to the darkness of the world and while I am willing to conduct a scientific experiment, I am not inclined to speculate one particle about the Mystic Hence until I pull up on that cloudy shore. One day, my imagination conjured up a lovely female, to whose entrancing proportions, Nanon was a briarwood knot and she declared unto me that she lived in one of the loveliest places of the unknown world and that she had forsaken it all because she loved me and wished to be my guide. I said to her,—dream that thou art and vision of loveliest form, such that the soul sees but crude flesh can never attain,—because, in my vision

NOTE.—Kamarupa. The alleged spirit-animal disembodiment of man.

I can see thee in greater perfection than ever in life, I must believe that the beautiful soul lives somewhere else than in the imperfection of the body, but begone, until the sufficient day has ended for me. That was a pleasant dream, eh?"

"Yea, and calls for another glass."

"Bah, the jug is empty. Strike a match to the gas and I will see where the cider bottles are."

"Never mind, we have had enough. Did I understand you to say that you believed in a hereafter for the soul, because you saw things more perfectly in dreams than in reality? Do you fancy that successive reincarnations would ultimately attain the perfection you beheld in your dreams in the physical itself?"

"Reincarnation is a veritable Calm of Life. But I do sometimes get serious on this head. The grain of wheat returns again and again, why not the ego? But there are objections. If the vessel goes amiss and the intending reincarnator is thrown out of a half formed body after months of anxious effort, just think of the time and opportunity lost. If a spirit anxious to return, choose a young medium of reimbodiment and that person refused to bear young, it would seem that the ways of reincarnation might be unpleasant and disappointing. Oh, I have thought it all out, there is really nothing certain but this homo brutalis. That is all we get out of it as far as I can see. What I believe is all moonshine."

"It is unprofitable at times to wade into metaphysics, but the wine and the surroundings are con-

ducive to a spiritual reverie. I feel what they call influences."

"I feel that often. It is a mild hysteromania of the brain and a little too much of it is known as genius. It is an hypnagogic condition,—an aura,—an imponderable matter like an atmosphere of the body, the essence of physical force, but when you understand it, it is simple enough."

"You are too etherially practical. I fancy that you are irreverent towards this wonderful instrument of ours."

"You have an exalted opinion of it, so have I, but mine is mechanical. Had I the making of it I would grow a horn over the points where the pressure of a button might give one hysteria. Then we would be less likely to have so many cranks on the spirit question. My father used to drum me full of it, but I think he got a shot once through the groin and that. after that, there was a good deal the matter with his spirit. Oh, I've thought it all out and I fancy I have gotten to bed rock. This feeling of influences is an epileptic aura, a current rises from some part of the body, the nerve forces get mixed or turned around and then the local motor system goes on a strike. I want to talk of something else, this is too simple. There is something radically wrong in this house,—here I am, young, strong, full of vril and able to battle with the world and yet I am rich, idle, side tracked, a recluse, a monk and by gosh, I'm a fool too."

"Well? Then why not wed a luscious lass and from these gloomy halls draw down the cobwebs of its deso-

lation? This were a palace for a prince, wherein a wife might find it well to fill each nook and corner and make the place look bountiful."

"Yes, yes, my good friend, I may do that. You encourage? A drink on that! Just so, when I have an enthusiastic subject to get drunk over, the jug is empty. I will get another jug at once."

"Yes, this is relishing. Here then, I drink to the future Mistress Urmoden whoever she may be!"

"And wherever she may roam!"

"And wherever she may roam!" repeated Sondalere.

"A light brunette with mellow eyes that peep through the long curving lashes, two lips drawn daintly,—a despair of the limner's art, a head with raven hair that flows wavily, a tenderness in the eye, my boy, soft cheeks that in the ripple have a heart fetching dimple, a nose as the crow flies, a brow finely arching and not indefinite, I like that sort of a girl, don't you?"

"Splendid. Only the man that went up against Gibraltar could tell it in that way!"

"Well then, I'm the man that went up against Gibraltar. So this would make a palace for a queen, would it? Hah,—a delightful thought!"

"Yes, and speaking of it, reminds me. You have promised me often the story of this mysterious place, this will be a good time to uncork a fable."

Ondell laughed in his unemotional fashion, that which was a deceiving art, for under the frigid callousness of his exterior, beat a great and noble heart, that had the courage to dare all things for the good

of the helpless, in very truth he had the childishness that goes with big heartedness and in companionship with brains that stand on the imperial heights of human majesty. Sondalere was his friend. The two had studied together at the University. They were mystics and had of late delved deeply into the secrets of hypnosis until the latter had become an adept. Ondell, being electric and non-magnetic could develop nothing of odyllic forces, but the genial and warm Sondalere could, at least, put the cat to sleep by winking at her. Ondell lived in a country that was rapidly building up. In his father's time it was a wilderness, but many men had come there and touched the forests and they fell, the sleeping sod teemed with wealth of produce, the Indian felt that the blight of death enshrouded his hunting grounds, the trees seemed to wither, a pestilence fell upon the wild children and they stretched by the cool brooks that flowed evermore down hill and dale and their lives went out.

Then came the lowland people and with the wand of ceaseless industry houses rose and gardens bloomed, where but shortly before, nothing broke the silence of the game haunted wildernesses, here they builded and bred and multiplied, perhaps to reincarnate the souls of the Indians, for one fancied, at times, that these Americans were not else than Indians under the mask of a white skin and a slightly gentler disposition. These people became wealthy and important, the Torquays, the Sondalere's, the Antieth's, even Carlton Philleo the elder, became prominent families, Champion City, though only a village, dreamed of future greatness

when it took its name and all that was well known to Sondalere,—he was an intimate friend, the mood was upon him to-night, he would take him down into the Cavern and let him wrestle for a while with the conditions therein, which, to the matter of fact Ondell, seemed to be inducive to extraordinary delusions and nothing more.

“Of course, I’ll tell you all about it. In the first place there is no mystery here, it is all humbug. There are no spirits here, I do not believe in such nonsense. My father was the strangest man that ever begat a son like me, he had his waking dreams and I have mine. He built thereon a real foundation, I do not. When he came here the Indian chief held ground. This had been his royal battling place. You might call it a kamaloka for Indians. My men have plowed up in the fields below bushels of arrows and battle axes, that had, in their day, gone through heads that the owners valued as much as we do ours and no doubt believed that they possessed something extra, that possibly, an eternal divine essence dwelt therein, they were as foolish as the latter generation of wiser men. But at any rate their skulls were staved in and that ended it. I’m getting away from the story, Sondalere, the wine is misleading me. My father was, like yourself, a magnetic, attractive man and that is why I am so unmagnetic, he used it all up on himself. He inspired one with a feeling that made you believe that he would do it, whatever it was, without compunc-

NOTE.—Kamaloka. A locality suited to generate spiritual forces.

tion. The Indian kept his eye on that one touch of Satan and let the man alone. When my mother died that I might live,—really, a most useless sacrifice, it was then that my father's nature changed,—so they tell me. When the clods fell upon her coffin, his heart went into the earth and his days were then in shadow lands. His soul and body dwelt apart, the tears were wont to trickle through his humor and we were exiles from human society, he by sorrow and I by inheritance. Here, I am as gloomy as my sire and a damn to the world, what say you?"

Sondalere was silent.

"As a boy, I kept the lamp burning at the roof to light up the valley, it was company, I was not so lonely when I looked upon it,—some thing surely lived for me as, day after day, I grew up into the full flesh of ardent life and my father shrunk away and grew white in the fingers and pale in the cheek,—then at last I bore his remains into the cavern below this house, and in the Cavern Hall, the grandest tomb on the face of the earth, sleeps my father into slow and sure decay. I keep him there that my mind may linger on his features, I shall forget them when I can no longer see them, is it not so?"

Sondalere was not prepared to answer the question. He was absorbed in the story and oppressed by a sense of uncanniness. Slowly and surely the creeping influences of the tomb came upon his nerves and despite his energetic courage, his susceptibility was so acute that he looked behind himself furtively, as if in expectation of seeing some ghostly thing at his elbow.

"You need not have fears of spooks, friend Sondalere, nor worry about the foundations of the house, my father looked to that. But there is an element of danger here. The beacon is fed by a pipe that leads into the farthest recesses of the cavern where gas wells up, gas that you see burning above you, natural gas, and it is the devil of the cave. It would smother me, it would keep the blamed old Indians,—I mean their bones, forever, unless I kept it burning all the time. And there might be an accumulation and then an explosion and a devil of a big hurrah,—if I am industriously particular about that lamp, it is for a good reason."

Ondell laughed carelessly, but his apparent mirth was not in the least reassuring to Sondalere, it added to his feeling of discomfort. The thought occurred to him that Ondell Urmoden might be some sort of a madman.

"The devil ought to love this place," he ventured finally to remark.

"That too, is of the child world of thought. You are a prey to your superstitions, I am trying to be rid of mine. I am willing to admit that I can not see beyond my comprehension. I cannot comprehend what happens here, but I know that it is all in my nerves, there is nothing else, oh, I've thought it all out. Yes, I admit that I am often oppressed by the sense of a presence. If I were superstitious I would believe that presence to be the shade of my father. If

NOTE.—Pseicheidron. The alleged spirit-soul embodiment, the Hindoo, linga-sharira.

I believed in the pseicheidron, then I would be persuaded that his soul often turns earthward in his dreams and comes thus gently to my side. I would believe that others come with him, they who are fierce of form like savages and who do not belong to the singing part of glory, if there is any, who having passed out in their chaotic savagery have come to me for the benefits of civilization. That is the only supposition about it that makes it appear genuine, the spirits are reputed to be foolish enough to come to such as me for pointers on being up-to-date. It is an hallucination,—I think I am somebody and my own creations must needs come to me, they'd disappear, if they didn't. But let me tell you, Sondalere, if they are the spirits of former men, I know that they are powerless in the strengths of this world and consequently I do not fear them."

"All this is very weird. I shall not sleep to-night thinking of them."

"And may it profit you. It is a big achievement to find out something about anything sometimes. You must not let this worry you. The feeling wears off and in the day of common sense, you will learn that you are the victim of your nerves. A horn may be growing into your organ of imagination,—"

"Would you seriously suggest it?"

"Well, I knew a fellow once, who used to get trances and then he'd claw his ear until he got a horn on the ear, at least. But that may be nonsense,—see here,—why the devil do you insist on keeping me out in the woods? I started to tell a story and upon my soul I

am like most other modern story tellers, I am preaching and lecturing and propounding all the while. That is not story telling. Of course the story has a right to an occasional lecture, if humorously done, but no man has the right to inflict his dark brown opinions on people in that way."

"Oh, go on. I want to hear about spooks, the story is telling itself."

"Well then, I think that I have inherited a peculiar tendency and that it reacts upon me. Then I dream wildly and being sane, I see sane things. Oh, I've thought it all out, there is nothing in it."

"I'm not so sure of it, friend Ondell, not so sure of it."

"I am. I've thought it all out at my leisure. This body is a machine given to run a time and after a fashion. Life is desire. Each life has an inherited quantity of desire. When that desire is freely gratified in drink or other indulgences, the quantum is more rapidly diminished than it would be in a temperate life, hence that life is shortened. Death is not the mere breaking up of the parts of the body for that has the capacity of rapidly replenishing itself, but a taking away at too rapid a rate from the sum of physical life and causes that which ought to endure an hundred years to die at fifty. Each body has a small sum of generative energy and all of it is needed. If I open a breast and bare the heart my hand could grasp it with slight effort and end life. A little too much morphine will end it. A little of many things will end it. Too much imagination will end it, that is

why I wish to get away from this condition and not to see the effects of too much imagination which is eating into my small store of life. But, on the principle that the organs slow down in sleep and that in a deep hypnosis one's little vibrating pod of life might be captured, you might find a point to work out, that is, if you relish high class murder. Get the secret of life and you will be master of death."

"No, no, not that. I'd rather use it to win love and gain happiness, not for anything else."

"That is honor. Having acquitted yourself, for gracious sake, let us talk of something else. I am in love, we'll talk of that. Hearts will shift as winds will veer, let us find the secret of a true heart. I have a little hope,—the hope of a measureless life, let me nourish that."

The philosopher of the unreal, paused to fill his staring glass and also that of his friend, who was lost in reverie,—perhaps in the realm of his special liking, that of the mysteries of the hypnosis. He was a weak man in his nerves and his distemper was the source of his power, some are strong in their strength, other in their weaknesses. Being a neurotic, consociation with him affected one's nerves. Not in a little degree did Ondell ascribe to him the many hallucinations that had of late troubled his own mind. Into the golden grained night sat these strange companions pursuing their cynical and sinister thoughts. Each seemed to have forgotten himself entirely under the spell of the hour and the wine,—and to have nodded for a moment, when suddenly a noise as if rocked by the forest's breath,—

a loud explosion in the vicinity roused them fully. Ondell ran to the gas meter and Sondalere to the door, but a moment later both had reseated themselves by the table.

"What the devil is the matter, anyway?" said Sondalere nervously.

CHAPTER IV.

DOLEE AND PHILLEO SURPRISE THE PHILOSOPHERS AND
AFTER A GLIMPSE OF A NETHER WORLD LEARN
SOMETHING OF THE SINISTER ARTS OF SONDALE.

“Hello! Hello!”

Ondell looked up. “That sounds like a mundane visitor.” He walked to window where the moon shone brightly. His servant had already admitted the guests to the courtyard. “By my soul, a lady, attended by a gaping fool,—”

“A brave young miss to venture into such a place as this,” said Sondalere.

“Now we shall have a chapter of the famous play, ‘The Sorrows of Satin.’”

“Oh yes, I remember, it opens like this:

“A sweet little girl sat on a turkish rug
And cheerfully played with a bright eyed pug.”

“Yes, the quotation is vouched for. Who the deuce can be this Miss Luna Tick who beards the lion in his den?”

“That would be well to tell the wife you were but a moment ago a wishing and a praying for.”

“Hush, hush! It’s the queen of county!”

The door opened and Miss Antieth walked in.

"Good evening, Ondell, are you surprised or out of humor,—which? Ah, my good friend Sondalere, I am glad to see you," and without further ado she went over to him and gave him her hand. This was intentional on her part, she wished to note the effect on Ondell and it was most unfortunate that the latter was flushed with wine and easily put in a desperate humor, as intensely high strung natures are, when under the spell of intoxicants. Almost momentarily, his geniality froze in his marrow and the boon companion, unused to the female heart, had become another man.

"Saints of this drear quiogozon, how dared you to venture out here alone with such a gaping idiot at your side?"

"How dared? Well now, you put me gruffly at my ease. I, that have come to see my future home, shall I come in or stay without!"

"Aha! Now do I read a page that I beheld an hour ago." Sondalere laughed as if to relieve the tension.

"Come in, come in, my dear,—and be welcome,—thrice welcome. And pray tell me what is your mission?" Ondell had begun to blunder almost immediately.

"Well, to tell the truth, my mission seems to have been to get blowed up in this miserable neighborhood,—"

"Yes, we heard the noise," said Sondalere, "what seemed to be the trouble?"

"Gosh blame it!" said Philleo, who had recovered some of his breath and pink colors. "Thar was no

seem about it. We was up agin the rale thing, whatever it was."

"What do you suppose it was?" asked Ondell moodily, for the wine made him heavy.

"Darned if I know. Seemed to me as if the devil come down like a thousand of brick, and a piece of him hit me on the back of my knick."

"To what else do we owe this visit?" again asked Ondell, apparently, not in the least interested in Philleo's troubles.

"And when you come to me at home, do I meet you frowningly at the door, in chagrin and surprise and ask you what your mission is? But since you have asked me, may I ask you what your mission is when you come to my house?"

"My dear friend,—my charming lady, you know full well that before my guest, whose mind is skilled in allegory, I ought to seal my tongue to what concerns him not. But as you have put the question before the house, I would say that you know full well that I am not an idle man, my visits mean much serious business."

"Bless me," said Sondalere, "I believe that you are having a lover's spat and furthermore, that you insinuate that I am an allegory. If I was dead sure about it, I'd get up a rumpus of some kind." Sondalere was in fine cheerfulness, but his thoughts traveled with the rapidity of lightning. A world of speculation opened up before him and his thought touched every point.

NOTE.—Knick. Corruption from German word, genick, the neck.

"This is a prospective marriage. She has her doubt of Ondell and she is right too. He is making matters worse. I am too late, I should have declared myself long ago. This is my last chance. I might try the magic that Ondell has taught me. When we spread our knowledge, we pile up the odds against ourselves. When she is mine, all will be right and then I'll make myself agreeable. Besides, I would do her a lasting service to get her out of this tomb. I ought not, but they say that all is fair in war and in love." These were his instantaneous thoughts.

"My visits mean some serious business also," Dolee went on to say, "my mission is to keep open eye, that in the erring steps of youth, I may not trip therein. There is a touch of allegory for you."

"Yess boss," interjected Philleo, who must needs put his bill in, "go slow thar, for you might be entertainin' a giant unawares."

"Philleo," said Dolee, severely, "will you take a back seat for a while?"

"Ah well, of course we are all right," said Ondell with an attempt at better humor; "join us at a glass and we will be better friends. I was rude and I apologize, I don't know what is the matter with me. Now this liquor has no evil hue, nor evil aftertaste, it is goodly liquor,—drink heartily." Ondell felt that he must do something to relieve the pressure.

"So it is. I'll drink with you and as I drink, I'll think of you, my gay and unfathomable mystic." Dolee looked at him squarely as she spoke to him and his eyes were frank and innocent. Nothing there might

betray his duplicity or his coldness, but then Tanton had that innocent, childish look too,—and the eye is a base deceiver.

“That new disease that they call barosis, which fellers git when they invite the whole house up for a drink, ain’t got this fur yet,” said Philleo.

“A thousand pardons,” said Ondell hurriedly.

“One will do. I’ll take out the other nine hundred in drinks.” That was as far as Philleo realized upon his knowledge of figures.

“You’re not so foolish as you seem,” said Ondell, offering him a glass.

“Wall, I may not think fust class, but thar ain’t anything the matter with my taste, that’s shore,” replied Philleo.

“Then get your mouth around it before you swallow it,” laughed Ondell, because Philleo had not recovered from his fright and natural timidity of the surroundings and spilled the wine on his chin. Sondalere had filled his glass and had evidently arisen to the occasion, for he stood up with a great flourish of gallantry and offered to touch Dolee’s glass and she hastened to reciprocate. These small attentions of Sondalere were very disagreeable to Ondell, probably, for the first time in his life he experienced jealousy. Sondalere was master of the occasion.

“Sweet maid, I drink to your eyes, the timid and brown, the loving and beautiful,” Sondalere was not precisely a master of eloquent words, but he could

NOTE.—Barosis. To stand treat indiscriminately.

string them out melodiously,—“I drink to the elysium of your future and to that awful tophet,—mine own future. Fate tears us apart, the beauty goes to the other man and Sister Haybag comes to me at last. That is all I can hope for,—Sister Haybag,—the beauty lingers not for me, alas,” and Sondalere was half in earnest, half in jest. In this mock sympathy he was an adept,—certain tricks of speech he knew well. “To our host, whose silent life, whose gloomy quietness of energy, bespeaks his grandeur, his strength and manliness unusual. Large measured, great and kind and just a trifle too much given to the strange things of this life,—but kind down to the marrow of his soul,—to him, I reverently drink!”

“Too fur down fur me, be gosh! Say, I like shallower streams, don’t you, Miss Dolee?”

Ondell felt nettled in some way, but hardly knew how he had been pierced. The play had been very delicate. “Sondalere,” he said, “I shall say that I appreciate your compliments, which I am sure is very kind of you, your words are ariose but in some things as incongruous as plums on a peach tree,—however, I thank you.”

“Tain’t that, boss,” said Philleo, “it’s the deepness and the wideness of yourself that worries me. Come closer to the shore.”

“I think I am well here,” answered Ondell, half resenting the intrusion of the rough fellow, though in this country unadulterated democracy ruled the roost. “If I stay here, I am always a possibility, but wherever you are, you are always an oyster.”

"That's a slim way of puttin' it. Thar's a case now, fur ye, whar a post stamp saved the day!" Philleo knew enough to know that calling him an oyster was not what it ought to be.

Sondalere did not relish the ill humor of his companions, he preferred good humor at any sacrifice, events would not progress as they ought, if these parted in anger. Anger, forgiveness and a reuniting stronger than before, to this it must not come if he was to have any success in his own efforts, he felt that unless something happened there would be a rupture between a man who was not altogether himself and a woman almost scorned,—a critical situation. So, without warning, he began to sing a plaintive song of Old Missouri, one that he had picked up somewhere in the backwoods, in the fruitful zone of genius, the world had never heard it.

"That was a touching, melodious song, a sweet song," said Dolee with her bewildering smile, "you have a wealth of sensuous melody, I never heard the song before."

"'Twas sung by one unloved of all,—a stranger in his native land,—a lover, whose anxious hour is ever on the doorstep spent, while his lass is hid secure within and he a creature of his own torment, is lonely, fretful, sad and sick."

"That ought to settle that," said Philleo, "I guess you have diagnosticated your case."

"Philleo!" commanded Dolee, "will you have more consideration for Mr. Sondalere? He sang a beauti-

ful song, a dream of harmony, simple, old fashioned,—sing it again."

Sondalere began again and Ondell looked at him severely, but to no purpose. Dolee had begun to admire him, not in jest, as heretofore, in this brief time he had grown upon her insinuatingly. His face was fair and evenly chiseled and his skin had the delicate pinkness of the temperate climes and highlands. His eyes were exceptionally brilliant, he did not need to work and his hands were somewhat delicate. Her thoughts went again to the days when they were playmates at school and washed their faces with the same snowball. Ondell was not lacking in intuition, despite his heavy draft of wine, and he felt that he was losing ground to Sondalere, though, apparently, he had nothing to fear, still he might have to rue this hour. He made haste to put himself to rights and with poor success. For, even then, as he sat there and tried to smile, while Sondalere was humorously revolving in his mind, the thought that his face might crack if he tried it too seriously, his case became desperate,—he was a noble young man, she reflected, but not the only one. He was indifferent in very truth even as Tanton had told her. Sondalere tried to impress himself upon her and no finer treason was ever enacted than that, in which he sat at the table of his friend and as he drank his wine, directed his thoughts into the mind of the lady he loved and powerfully impressed her with the suggestion that the man before her was out and beyond her reach and never could be satisfactorily brought within the range of her sympathies.

"What have I to offer?" he said sadly. "I am void of the glib graces of the tongue, neither can I sing for you. I am void of any sweet amusement that I might here unstore, in this essay, Sondalere may reach the expectations of his professions, but not me."

"Cheer up, friend Ondell, cheer up, we are all your sympathizers in your stated lack of charm and, of course, we all know better. By the way,—I declare, I had forgotten it, but you promised me a visit to the cavern to-night, how about it?"

"Circumstances,—"

"Have not altered the case," broke in Sondalere, "undoubtedly, Miss Dolee will join us and so will our friend Peachblow."

"Philleo,—that is, if you are meanin' me. I sot down on a feller once fer callin me pumpkin and he ain't got up yit, nuther." Sondalere smiled with evident amusement.

"Indeed, nothing would be more to my liking. I like the gloomy and uncanny,—that is, outside of man. I like a man that is cheerful, since that is the only creature endowed with the gift."

"Yes, donkeys don't laugh, that's er fact," said Philleo.

"But my dear Miss Dolee, you might not like it so well as you suppose. They tell tales of shadow men that tip toe through the gloom and from what they say of it, it savors of immortal fun. There is really nothing in it, you will be merely deceived by what you think you see. Let me explain. There is always an accumulation of gas in the cavern and it exerts a peculiar

effect on one. It is like laughing gas, or cocaine, it exalts the faculties and gives one the dreams of hash-eesh, so that you may fancy that you see strange things. Before you go into this, it is well to know what to expect."

"Delightful. I know that I shall enjoy it. Let us see the spectacle of the weird cavern of which we have all heard so much."

"Excuse me, please," said Philleo. "I'll keep house for you while you are gone."

"Oh no," said Sondalere, "you come with us."

"Yes, come with us," added Dolee.

"Gee whizzus! I'm in for it now. Remember our agreement, I'm to take the lead goin' home."

They went into an adjoining chamber and Ondell took from his pocket a key and knelt upon the floor. After a moment he arose and lifted up the trap door. Then he carefully inspected the gas meter and going down into the cave by a few steps, lighted a match and at once, springing from one to another with the rapidity of lightning, tiny lights spread down along the entrance of the cavern and Sondalere saw that the pipe that was fastened to the wall had a minute aperture at an interval of every six inches. As far down as they could see, the lights sprang to life and Ondell said,

"We must wait a few minutes. The gas that has escaped into the cave will be quickly consumed and then only will it be safe for us to enter. Then slowly, after a few minutes, he descended and taking the hand of his affianced, led her after him. Sondalere, in a

spirit of deviltry seized the unwilling Philleo by the hand and handed him down after her. The scene that opened upon them was grand and spectacular beyond description. Words or pen could not paint the shimmering, glittering, gleaming stalagmitic formations, the vast stretches of blue rock or the impenetrable gloom of the farther recesses. In Cavern Hall, the roof arched up grandly and gracefully and it seemed to be more than a hundred feet to the top. A pipe of lights encircled the vast cave and gave it all a ghostly brilliancy, it was a picture of a great room in one of nature's palaces, where diamonds, emeralds and gems, the most varied and beautiful, studded the sides in countless millions, though, in truth, it was in appearance only. It seemed to Sondalere that twenty or thirty acres of cavern stretched out before him and that there must have been a mile of lights going around it. He marvelled at the wonderfully beautiful effect of this, Dolee too, was lost in admiration. Ondell had now seated himself on a stone near the entrance of the chamber and he motioned to his companions to be seated also, but they preferred to stand.

"Before we proceed to explore, let your eyes grow accustomed to the glitter and finery of these imaginary things." The visitors looked about them wonderingly and the chill and dampness seemed to creep upon them as it will when the sense of grandeur is keenly awakened. Ondell was used to this intensely sublime scene and gave not a thought to the exquisite effect that it had upon his friends, the tremor, the indefinable throbbing, the sense of fascinating awfulness

threw its spell upon them and Dolee was especially susceptible to the trance conditions of her wildering situation. In this chamber there reposed many relics of former bodies. They were not often touched by the hand of man, but it seemed, that as they stood there and silently looked upon them, that a metempsychosis came to the inanimate relics and that an appalling spell began to permeate the place. In their excited imaginations, they fancied that they heard sounds and knew occultly of strangely forgotten legends, pre-consciousness came to them, shadows of dire catastrophies long forgotten seemed to pass before their eyes, sovran voices, not from the lungs of earthly men, seemed distantly to echo in the far away places into which their sight could not penetrate,—indeed, a mystic life permeated the cavern,—souls seemed bound in chains by some impulse and as they stood there, a deep, reflective melancholy came upon them all and they understood better why Ondell was at times so melancholy, he carried away with him the spirt of the dark place. And now, the antechamber, brightly and luridly lighted up and then the luridness became intensely ghastly, then died away, flared up again fitfully and then glowed as a light smothered behind a dense screen.

“The gas is unsteady,” volunteered Ondell, “you need not mind the strange effect that a fitful light will cause in a place like this,” but he noticed that Dolee was white unto death and that Philleo and even the courageous Sondalere, had occasional chattering of their teeth. Then, as if timed to the moment, in the

far off was heard a muffled sound as of something crashing down.

“Let me out, let me out!” cried Philleo, recovering some of his senses and he ran to the stairway and clambered up so agilely, that Ondell laughed with vigor, but his companions saw not the humor of it.

There was a haziness and a clamminess about all this. The spirit of it was upon Ondell,—the love of experiment,—the plodding into the science of it,—but to the inexperienced guests, what surrounded them, was the most terrible thing that they had ever encountered. They could not do otherwise than imagine that in the distance the faint forms of men and women became visible, the waters of the subterranean stream seemed to rise up and take the form of beautiful women, the rocks walked from their fastenings and took on the shape of mighty men and men awful in strength and visage.

“Oh, I see strange forms!” said Dolee, almost mechanically.

“And I,” assented Sondalere breathlessly.

“As I said. The gas is operating upon your imaginations. I have seen them for some time. The effect upon me is experienced earlier, because I am inured to the medicine. Let it not frighten you, but be instructed for a while in what is the most wonderful sense that you have,—that of calling up from nothing, the various forms of life, that seem to act and move and have the being of realities. It is wonderful.”

Even the bones seemed to them to be creeping together, then to set upright and then to rise, then again

to fall back with a loud clatter. The forms seen, now appeared to grow with life and the lights of the cave seemed to come about them, as if concentrating, balls of fire floated about, could it indeed be but imagination, that in its distorted fancy, took the lights from the wall and rolled them about in the atmosphere of the cave? The very bowels of the transparent forms seemed to take on the fire that gathered about and to gleam in luminosity,—ah, now, the whole place seemed as if it was a sea of light and that the utmost power of the spirit of light filled it,—it was noonday and countless faces were therein that glowed even beyond the brilliancy of the cavern and the guests could not bear its intensity. Only Ondell seemed not to care. When they looked again, for they had shielded their eyes, they saw only a semi-darkness, the balls of fire were now pink and threw no shadows and no light. To them, it appeared that as if in a spiritual crepuscule, men and women stalked about the hard floor, as if in their dreams. They knew not one another. They were strangers, not caring for each other's presence. It might be imagined to such an hell as one would, in truth, expect to find, where not one loved the other, where despair and loneliness gnawed their vitals and gloomy men and women, without hearts or souls, beat out the doom of a burdensome existence. Their hollow eyes flashed, the waters seemed now to brighten, as though mirrored upon their surfaces were a thousand stars together,—ever restless, the waves lashed themselves into a sound of pleading and it was such a nameless harmony as they never wished for again.

The atmosphere was now that of one laden with ices and the lights of the cavern burned blue. Then the lights burnt dark. Dolee drew near to Sondalere and Ondell turned away and then upon it all came such an appalling pandemonium that the guests were, if possible, yet more deeply terror stricken. One imagined that battle axes flew through the air, the cries of torture, of inhuman yells, the flashing of spears, the sound of wild onrush, then an exulting laugh, more then seemed to gather for the wild, fierce conflict and in the trueness to their inherited tendencies, both guests felt that there were no cowards there, they seemed impelled into the fight,—but no,—again the lights flared up and the two stood there and looked into each other's faces wonderfully. Ondell had gotten up from the rock and was now seen towards the middle of the cavern. He no longer appeared rational. He wandered about and gesticulated wildly, as if he led the victors of the battle. Then he seemed to sink down by a box that lay near the center of the cavern,—to kneel as if in prayer.

“The body of his father,” said Sondalere, but Dolee answered not.

Then upon this,—softly, at first almost indistinctly, a strain of music came to them as though a mighty harp was struck, a wave of sonorous ether, pregnant with grief, then to change as suddenly as it had come, into a rattle and patter of bony hands and feet and amid this awful infelicity and discord to distraction, Sondalere felt that he had heard and seen enough. He seized Dolee by the arm and backed away to the stair-

way and swiftly ascended. He was anxious to get away from that place. His influences were feeble indeed, in comparison to those of this loka of the past, where it seemed, that the virile forces of an prehistoric world had gathered in the sole place on earth that might yet continue to hold them and there to re-awake to reveries like unto the orgies of the damned.

"Could this, indeed, be but imagination," asked Sondalere of his companion.

"No. This is awful. Let us go away and seek a more rational world."

"Yes, let us go now," said Sondalere in a subdued voice, "we must not become insane with these things. We must not, indeed, be carried away by such things as this."

The two went out into the courtyard to their horses and were soon finding their way down the steep hill,—they were again into the moonlight of another world and neither seemed to care what had become of Ondell in the depth of his trance in the nether world.

CHAPTER V.

SONDALERE AND DOLEE RIDE TOGETHER AND THE LATTER BY MENTAL SUGGESTION FINDS HERSELF INVOLVED IN ANOTHER LOVE AFFAIR.

It seemed strange to Dolee how well she felt as she rode home beside the happy Sondalere. She believed that she ought not to feel this unnatural exaltation of spirit, that something more than her normal self had possession of her, that despite her increasing doubts of Ondell she ought not fail to weigh maturely all these things that she had seen and heard,—indeed, he was not easily forgotten or to be readily banished as an idle memory. In truth, this condition that surrounded him was not conducive to frank and ready sympathy from her, she lived in a country and in a large degree had the simple mindedness of the country folk. She must not become a party to this kind of life—her friends would forsake her, she was lonely enough as it was, the Lord knew—but if she married this man, she would indeed be the sisterly mate of the monk.

This had been an exciting afternoon and one not likely to be soon forgotten. It was not all clear to her, her mind seemed even yet to be involved in vague and unnatural surroundings, still the mystic faces seemed to follow her and fain to depart as soon as seen. Her fancy was distorted by the things of the previous

hour, there seemed to lay a phosphor whiteness on the fields, a glow as smoulders on dead, rotten things and anon the bright and golden grained night, seemed, in its rich splendor, to be fading until all things seemed dim and wan: Then she sought strenuously to arouse herself and her thoughts took on a different hue. Despite her trampled vanity and her misspent longings, she must not give way to these forebodings. Unconsciously, the thought seemed ever intruding that she must resign herself to Sondalere, that this was her predestined fate, that all other loves had been idle and to no purpose because they had not been in line with destiny. Never before had the idea of predestination appeared so striking and so manifestly true. Long as she had known this man, it had not occurred to her that he was more than a handsome and entertaining fellow, she remembered that he had always a charm of manner and a gift of the soft word, but his present attractiveness and intense physical suasion she had not hitherto discovered. She pictured to herself the fact that he did not appear to be strong, either physically or intellectually, his aspect was graceful, but not likely to inspire one with a profound admiration for manly dignity. He was of the type to whom God has given chin whiskers and left the side whiskers in his work box. And yet notwithstanding this, he drew as with a magnet and insinuated himself into her heart and into her thought wonderfully. She did not know what this meant, altogether this was new to her and it was not understandable. As one that lived in the deep dream she seemed to move along with the current of events

and satisfied as she was, that her companion was not perfection, nor even a partial embodiment of chivalry or that within him dwelt the soul of nobleness—yet she did not know, perhaps, he was better than she had always believed. She had known a great deal of him, he was of the people, nothing other than of the common herd who had gotten up somewhat in the world and that reminded her that the thought was strictly personal. She esteemed herself highly, in fact, above the ordinary, but it was handsomeness alone that gave her the privilege, her own birth, while as good as that of any person that ever animated the clay, was not as aristocratic as that of Ondell. Yet Sondalere was a fetching fellow and devoted and pliant to her wishes, one who would be, in the event of his intending it, a passable and respectable husband. Such thoughts as these engrossed her almost involuntarily. Sondalere probably had such thoughts, his vanity was not overweening, he believed in himself, to be sure, but not that he ever imagined that he was born into the world for the express purpose of setting it on fire. He was an humble man after a fashion, his pliancy could not have existed in conjunction with a spirit as proud and severe as that of Ondell. However, such thoughts as these filled her mind as she rode along, she had no need to marry him, in a degree, wounded pride, a spitefulness of a high kind was upon her, she was on the eve of doing anything for the purpose of having satisfaction of somebody,—precisely what the process was, by which such a state of mind was caused, she could not tell. The spirit of rebellion is as mysterious

often, as that of other deep passions. Even yet, the music, wierd and lonely, seemed to enwrap her senses, as if yet, she walked in the dim recesses of Cavern Hall, the long ago was blended into its harmonies, as if a pity for all things, a sound of wail and pain,—these came again to her as the saddest of fancies that had ever filled her mind.

“A penny for your thoughts,” said Sondalere, as if anxious at last to break the spell of loneliness and silence.

“A pound will not buy them, my friend,” she replied, as one that had been surprised out of a depth beyond her senses. “I declare, I dreamed a dream as I rode along and it was not pleasant to me. I thought I walked in the Cavern,—in the cavern of purgatory, where coldness and hate and an utter dearth of love or pity reigned supreme——”

“A terrible place, imagine yourself mistress of that Cavern! You’d never think of anything else. You’d get into that vague unearthly influence and it would hound you to insanity.”

“But I was not thinking of Cavern Hall particularly, I meant——”

“But a fair type,—I know, you but dreamed. Still, of course,——”

“Really do you think one could become insane in such conditions?”

“They are all insane. I have done with it all. It has exerted a spell over me until I am well nigh bewitched. I break away from it this night. I have

enough of Ondell Urmoden and his unearthly business."

"He is really strange. I thought much of this talk was superstitious humbug until this evening."

"But now you have the truth."

"It may be humbug."

"It is not humbug. If it is, I want none of it anyway. You and me are too sane to be mixed up in the business. We are rational, normal, ordinary people and God has made us for the world of effect, not that of its shadows."

"You are right, undoubtedly."

"Glad you think so."

Dolee was silent. The moon lighted with ghastly gleaming the lichenized mosses that covered the rocks by by the roadside and there was beauty, even at night, in the tangled ferns that stood by the brook that flowed evermore down hill and dale, where also the timid harebells grew. The tiny golden rod and the purple aster not yet fringed the dell, nor laces of crimson and spears of gold yet looked out with rare life where the barberry leaned, when in later days it was decked in royal red,—not yet the wild summer bloomed beneath her wandering feet,—it was early season and she felt, as with the freshness of spring, that she was indeed too young for the sombreness of the Mansion of a Thousand Stairs or the autumnal depth of the domdaniel cavern under it, that Sondalere was right, she had no business with this summer of sedateness or this autumn of chill—that Ondell, though young,

was yet old, too old in his mind for her and that Daltil was more to the season of her heart.

As they rode together, it seemed to come home to her that the world is, indeed at times, a lonely place, so lonely that one involuntarily seeks the noise of his fellows and the din of machinery,—that, at times, the hum of life is the only reassuring thing there is.

The hilly lands lay locked in night's embrace, the tinkling bells were hushed, the busy mill was still, all around was nothing of sound or life to reassure her, yes, of all hearts that yearned for companionship and prayed for devotion and throbbed with the fullness of life, hers was alone and utterly forsaken. Yet as she thought this thought, she knew that it was not true, but somehow into this strangely passive aura of sorrow she found herself, nor yet found any means of ridding herself of the nightmare,—she could not fathom the spell that had been thrown upon her, this had surely been her strangest day.

“Dolee,” said Sondalere with more familiarity than he had ever shown to her, “You are a sweet, dear girl.” The suddenness of it was refreshing.

“Thank you, Mister Sondalere, I am delighted to learn the state of your thoughts to-night.”

“But you are, of all the ladies of my acquaintance, the most charming and the loveliest.”

“Again I thank you” she replied with some less interest for she was used to verbal saccharinity.

“Would it surprise you to learn that I presume to love you?”

“It would indeed, my friend.”

"Then you are presented with my surprises. I suppose it would surprise you also to be married by this time to-morrow."

"Really? One would suppose that I am in a hurry."

"Oh, no. It has happened often."

"But it is not likely to happen to me, especially in view of the condition in which we left the prospective."

"Change partners."

"A gay dance you would lead me into."

"Not at all. Imagine that Sondalere is as good as any one."

"Surely,—I hope you do not infer that I ever thought otherwise."

"Then you could not have the unkindness to refuse me."

Dolee started and laughed uneasily. "We must not jest. Our experiences to-night ought to make us solemn."

"Yes, my friend, I am not in jest, I would you have me taken seriously."

"How strange you speak to-night, Mister Sondalere."

"But I am not strange. I would startle the neighbors with an elopement if I could."

"Well, I declare!"

"Why not? We can be as comfortably married as any people in the world."

"Eloping would be uncomfortable. I have no one to ask, have you?"

"Certainly not. Let it be open and public then."

"Oh, but I only asked a question. I did not mean to consent, you have taken me up too early."

"Why not then make it a consent? You will be happy with me?"

"Do you think so?"

"We can try to be happy. I am sure that life is brief and that I am not one to bring sorrows into its few days. I am easily content. Comfortable, and capable of love, especially of one so fair as you. I love you, I have loved you all my days. I wish only you. Life would take on another meaning of you shared it with me."

"A late declaration, Mister Sondalere, really I never——"

"Timid always. But you have my earnest, heartfelt and serious question, what shall be the answer?"

"Let me think."

"And to-morrow you will meet me here by the old mill at three o'clock and we will ride together."

"How you would hurry matters. Is there haste?"

"Not in the least. But for the sake of Tanton and Sir Ondell, it might not be a bad idea to show the seductive goddess a new wrinkle and at the same time surprise the neighbors."

"Perhaps. I will consider it thoroughly."

Daltil had spoken with unabashed confidence, because he believed that his art of suggestion, his mastery of the subtleties of the human will, was complete. He had not devoted hours of experiment at this secret force for naught. He believed in the potency of the art of personal magnetism. He believed

that one could compel admiration. Men had, in secret, mastered these arts and had used them on their fellows to their own advantage, honor and success had followed upon it. To him, life was mechanical, it was subject to influences, certain powers controlled it, he believed that into the *arcana* of life, he had penetrated and that what he willed to do would come to pass.

It seemed to Dolee that, in the conditions in which she found herself, that this would be a unique and easy solution of all questions. This one admitted of romance, chivalry, revenge and unexpectedness. Woman loves to surprise. It was not without dim humor that she looked at this matter and it seemed peculiar that her inherent coquetry had been so subjected, it was all so natural and so pleasant a thing to contemplate, that she could not muster up the remotest idea of a refusal. She was persuaded by the suggestion. Whatever it was that had come over her, she had now the feeling of being self satisfied,—complacency, peacefulness, lack of rebellion, whatever possessed her,—it seemed that at this time, she could have been led willingly into anything. She had, as it were, fallen into an amatory prostitution and her desire to resist was abnegated to such an extent, that had she been less chaste in habit and less in the mind of negated desire and she been in context with one less honorable morally than Daltil Sondalere, anything might have happened. But Sondalere, while dishonest to the extent of believing that all is fair in love and that he had the right to win the lady by any means whatever,—and believed also that after the marriage everything would

right itself, and, that he did not lack in ability to make himself agreeable during the honeymoon,—and that thereafter, no one would think of disturbing the statu quo,—had no other vices; his art was powerful, but in himself he was timid and cowardly and that made him shrink from baser things—he wished her because he had long admired and loved her and his intentions were honorable.

“What would Ondell think of me after that?” Dolee asked.

“That need not worry you. And it would hardly worry him a fortnight. He has peculiar ideas of women. To him they are elemental and quite subsidiary to man.”

“Yes?”

“He belongs to the safe old school in which women are a “part and parcel” only. To me they are equals in all things. My wife shall be my partner in all things and my companion in every sense. Ondell’s wife will be one of the luxuries of his establishment, to be exhibited,—and to be put aside,—when she is in the way.”

“Are you sure that you do not wrong him there?”

“I would not wrong him for aught in the world. He is a good man, of course he is, but not down to the level of humanity.”

In the silent twilight hour that seeps into and loosens up the soul, she rode along by the brook that flowed evermore down hill and dale and as one that was awake in the depths of a dream, she felt inclined and even happy to hang upon his wishes and to en-

joy his presence and his thoughts, his whim and impulse even, were as a law to her, she bent to his will and had no purpose of her own wherewith to lay the barriers of resistance.

Thus was pledged the lives of two who were destined of life's sorrows to have full meed. That night, when he had ridden away and left her on the porches of her home, it was a gay and noble knight that departed,—not an hour after that, as she lay awake thinking of it all, she laughed to think how completely and how easily she had been persuaded into a great happiness.

CHAPTER VI.

ONDELL AND AN UNSEEN FORCE OPERATE A TELEGRAPH
AND HE CONCLUDES THAT HE IS THE VICTIM OF A
SPIRITUAL AS WELL AS OF AN AMATORY DELUSION.

Ondell was surprised not to find his guests. He called out loudly but got no reply. Then he went up the stairs to his room leaving the lights burning below. No one was there and until now he had taken no note of the passing of time. He remembered that it was seven o'clock when he went into the Cavern, now it was eleven.

This, in itself surprised him, he had never noticed that time passed like this, it seemed to be but a moment ago. Naturally, the interval of time must have passed and during that time he must have been asleep or unconscious. He hoped that neither was true. He must not sleep before his guests and to have been unconscious was worst of all, had it really been this? How many kinds of a fool had he made of himself in the four hours that had passed? Could it be that he had trances? Did he get into these mystic spells that he had seen come upon others and really see all that he otherwise imagined? It must not be. He did not sleep, he did not entrance himself, what a shame it was to him to think so, how could he ever again face his

sweetheart and how could he apologize for his conduct?

While such tingling thoughts as these surged through his brain that now operated as one released from some confinement, he seated himself at the table above which burned brilliantly a jet of gas. On his table was a telegraph key which had been placed there by his father and had been long used by them both to get the news of the world. Both of them knew its uses and were competent telegraphers. To his astonishment he noticed that suddenly the sounder worked wildly. "I, I," he made out and placing his hand on the key he answered in the same way.

"Cut out the wires," was the strange request.

Ondell went to the switchboard and cut out the instruments, then went back to the table. As soon as he came within a yard of it, the sounder commenced working again and as he drew back, it stopped. Then he went near it again and it commenced as before.

"This a new one on me," he said. The sounder slowly and hesitatingly ticked out a message which he read.

"Wichell of Urmoden, it is I."

Greatly surprised, Ondell answered with the key, the question,

"Father?"

"Mastered at last. Sit near me," repeated the sounder.

"Mastered it?" asked Ondell.

"Yes to work the sounder. Sit still, I need strength. Wait," ticked the sounder again, not weakly and with hesitation, but powerfully.

"Lights out below. Traitors gone."

"Where?"

"Home."

"Who are traitors?"

"Sondalere, lady."

"What else?"

"Let them go for a spell. It is better fate."

"Are you my father?"

"Yes."

"I doubt you. You are a pretending spirit."

"I am not. You will listen or you will know what disobedience means."

"Then I am subject to you. I am subject only to earth life. I doubt you."

"You are subject to spirit life wholly. What is here is reflected in your world. All things are done here. Causes are here. Effects in your world. You will leave the woman for a time."

"She does not love me, is that your message?"

"She loves you."

"Then why leave her?"

"She will leave you."

"One of us is a fool. I doubt you. I am not a fool. My father was not a fool. He never troubled about women. Why should my father dead trouble of things that never troubled my father living."

"For your good."

"You are a lying spirit. Give me a sign. I believe not. You know my mind. I doubt all things."

"Yes, I have not power to give sign. Believe the word, else fate cannot be frustrated, you will suffer."

"Fate is fate. What will be, will be."

"Well then,—" and the sounder ticked faintly, so imperceptibly that while Ondell saw it faintly moving he could not make out the letter. Long he sat there and waited for the force to resume its strange message, but all in vain. His thoughts were eager and painful. She loved him. Leave her for a time. What could it mean?

In his anxiety, sleep was out of the question entirely. He smoked and drank in vain to woo the drowsy god, but to no purpose. At last he remembered that he had forgotten to turn out the lights of the cavern and then he went down again, not that it was needful to go down, but because he had nothing else to do and he felt some curiosity to know whether he could find his steps on the limestone floor wherewith to give himself some clue as to what he had been doing in the preceding four hours.

Ondell's thoughts were now varied and interesting. At all times his brain was full of theories and this night having been released from a condition of mental subjection, he felt free to give his faculties unlimited play. "None of this can be true," he was saying to himself. "This life is unconscious as far as the next is concerned in it, as unconscious as prenatal life. Our movements here can have as little effect on the hereafter as the stirring of the unborn child. What I have heard, or imagined I heard, is a delusion. What I do here is of no note whatever in the hereafter,—if there is one." His notions on that subject were va-

ried. At times materialism persuaded him, at others, spiritism seemed the solution. He did not know and he was not very anxious to be informed. That is how it stood with him, but for reasons somewhere in the realms of cause, the manifestations of over-life would intrude themselves upon him as if to persuade him against his will. "Life is merely a problem," he was thinking, "and mainly a problem of intermittent life at that. I am willing to believe that as man has intermittent days of consciousness, with nights of unconsciousness between them, that our lives are in like manner intermittent. The rise of life in childhood and its waning and slowing down in age seem to demonstrate its intermittency. Ah yes," it occurred to him "when, there is rejuvenescence is old age, how would that go with the intermittent life theory possibly, the second life begun before the first terminated,—no,—the theory has its beauties, but there seems to be something wrong with it. Would it not be possible to discover the secret of hibernating or suspending the flow of life forces in age until a new spirit of life can take hold? That would mean the indefinite prolonging of life. That would be a good idea for Tanton, it is in his line. To sleep a life and wake a life, to ease down and wait in partial consciousness for the new incarnation,"—Ondell laughed at his own speculations, "how utterly foolish is the brain of man," he was thinking.

He looked upon the wierd scene around him, the relics of the dead bodies lay at his feet. The influences that had exerted so much influence on him some hours ago were no longer present. As a sane man he looked

upon the picture of desolation and laughed to himself at his doubts. He neared the bier of his father and the reveries of his mind were those of the utter vanity of all things. "Nothing but a few bones, a frame whereon some flesh was hung, but what was in the flesh? Tell me that. This bone, the lips of wisdom held, this brow the frown of rulership, this nose was a triumphal arch above a cavalier of manhood, here glowed the fiery eye and in this dome stood the sentinel of the soul, alas, now all is fled away and sleeping in nothingness. The homo—the secret—there we have it. I see two virile centers, the zenith and the nadir of this proud and mighty clay! The virility of one has given life to physical being, the virility of the other has given us living thought! Ten thousand years ago there lived a man whose simple story has survived the flight of greater things! A few words that have lived in the breath of everlasting life!" Ondell was amused at his comparison of the mighty and the insignificant and in the reverie peculiar to the character of his intellect, he thought of the great and the little,—sometimes with rare insight. "Here we have the bones of many men, sons of fathers who were hung for the murder of their mothers,—and all in blessed immortality. I will not believe this thing! In that paradise there are no runts, there is no hunchback heaven, the perfect form alone can be an angel. It is a curious thought, have these angels internal organs? What would I give to see the pink liver of a spirit! I suppose that their bodies have sheets of life tissue, as for instance, along the peritoneum, the pneuma and the pericardium and other

mucous membranes, that would, in my opinion, be the place to settle the life of the spirit, it must be more than a simple shell, it must be a well filled shell," and having delivered himself of this sage idea, he was silent for some time. "It is all a delusion, all of it. I cannot believe this thing, reason turns my mind the other way. The incongruities, the impossibilities of it,—I am right, I am deluded by these alleged manifestations."

Ondell, after his fashion was thinking it all out as he claimed always that he did. He was always ready with the statement that he had thought it all out and so far as he was concerned, that settled it.

"And that other delusion? Does my lady love me? One delusion declares to me that the other delusion is the real thing, now, what am I to believe? When I think of my friend Sondalere it is to link him with the serpent fish of the sea, a mere contact with the bristles of his rubskin has made white patches on my soul and yet I always believed him to be a harmless minnow. Perhaps, one's misfortune is in himself and requires but some weak current to develop it. Well,—perhaps, love is so intermittent a thing that it veers like a vane with each flutter borne on the breeze of hope.

"The bridal pair will, in time, transfer their affection to their children, when these grow up, the bridal couple turn again to each other and when the grandchildren come, they as promptly forget each other. In old age, when almost all is done and the sunrise of the infinite quiet of time hangs upon them, they turn again to

themselves and so every love, is the love of the varying mood.

“Ah, well, they are gone and I am alone. Thus do I learn to suspect the love that my lady holds for me and so do my dreams of wedded bliss fall into the veritable substance of dreams. Pshaw, I must become accustomed to the world, I set myself up too reservedly, like dreamers who set their heroes in a palace, where care nor cooking has a part and dreamers lack ability to put them elsewhere. Only the great mind can take the common things of life and make them interesting. The gilt of the palace is easy to make gleam, ever so feeble a light scintilates upon it, but the art of glorifying the dish pan, the apron and the duster, I have not learned. But I will learn it and then shall neither Tanton, nor Sondalere, nor even Philleo, boast their powers over me, I will be as plain of fact as they.” Even as he walked around, he felt that his thoughts were those of a foolish man. He recalled one thin, transparent face that had come upon his dream, like indeed to a drowning man that beckoned him out into the depths to his sodden self, as though he implored a rescue and then he recalled the stern, defiant face,—even the look of warning and God alone might know the meaning of all this.

Slowly, he walked to the stairway and began to go up. Still his eager thoughts haunted him, he seemed to rest forever at the birth of some immortal thought when in this singular frame of mind, his induced delirium evoked a startling power of imagination. “Indeed this is the grandest problem in the world. Here,

I look out as it were, upon the ghosts at play and yet I see but my own thought forms—my dream, it is insanity. Come what may, yet must I face the end and so I'd best nerve up my life with boundless love and be courageous to the end. If I only knew. She love me? She says she does, but doubt, deep set and dangerous, embitters many a moment. If I knew, then might I wait in fortitude on every fate. I must get away from here!"

So he soloquized in his intense, picturesque fashion. He had now gotten to the first stair and turned and put out the lights below him. "This pipe is making trouble of late, there is something not altogether right about it, probably, like its owner. Umh! Some day there'll be a pretty mess of trouble here!"

CHAPTER VII.

DOLEE BECOMES A PREY TO DOUBT AND ONDELL HAS OCCASION TO BERATE HIMSELF FOR HAVING TOO MANY PROBLEMS TO SOLVE.

Although Dolee had promised to meet Sondalere by the aquage where stood the grim old mill, the day after their night ride from the Mansion, for the implied purpose of an elopement, she failed to do so. Once to herself, a certain capriciousness of temperament asserted itself and as she thought, hour after hour, over all the curious circumstances of her mind in that time, she laughed uneasily as one that had an issue to meet that she feared and yet that must be met. It was a distasteful situation, from the final issue of which, there could not well be a shrinking away. But while the impulse to follow the suggestion of Sondalere was strong, it was not strong enough. Just how it fared with Sondalere or what passed in his mind at the hour of three, as he waited by the old Mill cannot be fathomed,—whether, true to his disposition, he was half positive, half shrinking from the issue, whether it was a mere intense whim or a deep set purpose, it is impossible to delve into the inner workings of his mind. He was difficult to comprehend, he was weak and strong at the same time, he was full of positivity and full of contradictions as well. For the rea-

son that he did not fully know his own mind, it is impossible for any one to read the workings of his mind, for it was aimless usually.

It is certain, however, that he was either not sufficiently powerful in will, or that there is, beyond the greatest forces of the will, something that cannot be subjected to hypnosis or bent to the force of human suggestion. There is, perhaps, a force, greater than any physical forces that belongs to another part of the phenomena of life,—or possibly to the over-life, that has resisting powers greater than that of all other forces. The shell or magnetic aura is said, by the learned metaphysicians, to be, in some persons, impenetrable to external influences and that in the higher aspects of hypnosis, a moral, uncriminal person, cannot be induced to crime, but that one of immoral and criminal tendencies may be. The force given them is in the direction of their natural tendencies.

It is certain that Dolee was strong morally and that the beauty of her soul was only equaled by that of her person. And so it was that, after a fashion, this proposed clandestine marriage, and this sudden breaking from Ondell, however much the provocation, savored somewhat of an unvirtuous act. She was loth to bring herself to this passage, on the other hand, her temptation to do so was equally strong. Yet the hour came and passed and Dolee found herself unprepared for the ride, in fact, undressed and nothing ready. So the afternoon wore into the evening and she kept herself closely to her room in a vague fear that something unexpected might happen.

Sondalere, meanwhile, rode up and down the tortuous road and as four o'clock and five o'clock came, he began to realize that there was something wrong with his telepathy. Finally, his impatience became such that he tore angrily at the reins and hurt his horse's mouth, for which, he was the next moment sorry. A few curses escaped him and in his great impatience something might have happened had there been anything for something to happen to.

Then came a rift of hope, as suddenly, Philleo came cantering down the hill. "There is my message," he said to himself gleefully, "something has detained her," and he impatiently awaited Philleo. The latter had a wide thin nose on a narrow face and at times a sheepy look. This was particularly true this day.

"Hello,—good evening, what news?" asked Sondalere.

"Hello, you livin' yit? I thought you was dead."

"Do you come from Antieth's?"

"Me? I hain't been thar yit. I took to the woods last night and am just scrapin' up nerve enough to hunt up some of my fellers. Gee whizzus! When I think of it! I am feelin' poorly, poorly, I don't want to see annuther ghost ever again, not me."

"Yes, you look like as if you were in a rapid decline" said Sondalere—all his hopes knocked into a cocked hat and in no humor for civilities, "you'll be in the frying pan before long, I'm afraid."

"And you?"

"Oh, I'll come later, replied Sondalere in utter abandon.

"You don't seem to be in bloomin' health, Dalt, what's up?"

"You need not ask, I am not telling my troubles on the road to-day?"

"I see. Not a good time to ask charity, your wife's in jail. Been thar myself. But, thank the Lord, I haven't got near as much agin the world this week as I had last week, I'm feeling better, thank you,—but I like to died last night, didn't you?"

"No. We only had a set-to with Macbeth," said Sondalere, laughing.

"Was that him?" asked Philleo quizzically, "I know he was some punkin and I pulled my freight right then and thar. Sez I, Phil, old hoss, you've been a long time gittin' to the hills of purgatory and if you stay 'round here, the rest of the journey is goin' to be instantaneous."

"Your getting out was almost instantaneous, I noticed."

"You didn't either. You didn't have a thumbnail of sense left last time I seed you. Well, I must be goin' to home. I've got some of that strange, uneasy feelin' that some feller is layin' for me with a gun behind a clump somewhar and I'm tryin' to git him fust."

"I feel uneasy myself, Philleo."

"Maybe it's a case of unrequited love with you," he said, as he trotted on, leaving the fretful Sondalere. He looked at his watch, it was now six o'clock and when Philleo was out of sight he angrily dug his heels into the ribs of his patient horse and galloped down the road, swearing revenge of a truly direful kind. But

he had not gone far until his inherent debility of will manifested itself and then he turned back and rode furiously in the opposite direction. He would go to her home and see what was the matter. When, after half an hour's hard riding, he came to the place, his determination had again oozed out and he rode by sullenly, not daring to call. Yet, he must not be angry with her, something had happened that had detained her, perhaps, it had been taken only in jest and he must not condemn until he knew all. Therein he would be just, especially, as that was all there was to do about it. Besides, his mental state destroyed his influence over her. He had not, with all his art, taken that into consideration. Possibly he was to blame for it. He tried to recall his thoughts at two o'clock and at three o'clock, but the evanescent things were gone into oblivion forever.

Dolee saw him from the window of her room as he rode by sullenly and stiffly and her feelings were curiously commingled. She could not have despised this man, it was not in her heart to have contempt for anyone, all men had good qualities to her thinking and in that she had truly a large benevolence. And yet, as he rode by, the picture was one likely to excite a sense of the ludicrous, and she must needs compare him to the surly portraits of Napoleon—the fabled ones, wherein his face seems to be trying to hide a stomach full of pepper. So, to her, the master of an imaginary army, rode down the way at the head of his battalions. She had, undeniably, something akin to real regard for him and she pitied him in his

present disappointment, she was sorry that she had been the cause of it. Yesterday, she had not been her old-time self. Yesterday, she had been a prey to whims and a nightmare rose up before her. To-day she lived in a broader light,—one that leads down the broad and easy road to Old Maidhood.

And really, would it be a sane act on her part to marry this man in this way? All the day this single thought, this monition as to the propriety of the act, had intruded itself upon her in despite of her attempts to throw it off and it clung to her desperately, that it would be a proper thing to do. It was not foreign to her mind to disdain the gentle and insinuating Sondalere, not even while she laughed at his evident discomfiture. That idea was probably strongest in the mind of Sondalere. He believed with all his might that it would be an eminently proper thing to do. His vanity disclosed this to him and his vanity was, if anything, a shade stronger than his will and likely, for this reason, his contemplations had gone overboard. But to have gone overboard by the gangplank persuasion was what galled him, if it was unavoidable, he could bear it, if she had resisted him successfully and had deceived him maliciously, that would be another matter. This marriage was a devotedly wished-for consummation. He was, at least to himself, as good featured, as noble minded, as well moneyed and as fully everything else as any man in the fertile valley of Bourbese. She was the belle of Gascony and the unfailing delight of Champion City, he was not to be despised, not at all,—

in fact, Dolee, least of all, entertained any such idea,—he was equal to all others in most things, admittedly, it was only that indefinable essence and soul searching affinity, the unreadable riddle of love, that impelled her to Ondell. What affectional alchemy lay behind it all! What a mystery, that between many men, standing before one, each given with many noble qualities, one's sudden impulse is to this one or to that one and the current of life ever after brooks no turning aside. The twin soul has found its mate. Could she be satisfied to learn to love this man? Had she not been enabled to forget the love she once had for Tanton Torquay? Fie upon that, it was not love, it was an imaginary condition. And Ondell's, was that too an imaginary condition? Could she pass from one to the other and learn to love this man, would it all grow with the beauties of other days, with daily associations and personal contact? To that sphinx, the appeal was vain. Love keeps a dear school and fools will learn in no other.

In the evening, after she had supped, she felt a rising of her spirits, in fact, as nourishment is conducive thereto, a feeling of greater cheerfulness came to her and she felt that there was no need for alarm, whatever would be her lot, with that she would be satisfied.

Then Ondell rode up and hitched his horse to the fence. Though it ought not to have done so, his sudden arrival startled her as though she had been guilty of some flagrance and had been detected. In tenfold intensity, all the sorrowful feelings of the day and of the previous day, returned in that moment. Ondell

came in and cheerfully bade her the hour. He kissed her cheek, as he had always done, since the day of their betrothal and his manner was so open and frank, that her fears were dispelled and the sense of shame vanished. But none the less, since yesterday, a barrier had unconsciously almost, but surely, thrown itself up between them and their relations to each other seemed not to be as they had been. Perhaps, they could never again be the same. She had learned of the depth of his character and stood, as it were, at the door of the secret of his mysterious nature. Hitherto he had been one of the young men of the country, about whom there was nothing especially unusual. But now the sage,—the philosopher,—the scientist,—the occult student and the man of many mysteries stood before her and she hesitated to be as charmingly free with him as she had always been. She was overawed by the apparent fact that she was face to face with a superior and ennobled intellect and one that must command her respect and if anything, her obedience, they had always been equals,—now he stood on a pedestal and she, at his feet. She had not learned to distrust him, because that was impossible, she believed not the idle word that had been told her, but she now knew something else,—that this man was the slave of intellect, whose companions lived in dry leaves, in a state of eternity, to be sure, but to her, they were not in the least companionable.

She had never fancied the idea of being tied to a philosopher, she desired companionship,—she desired the lord who would take a fancy to sit in the kitchen

and discuss the tittle-tattle of the neighborhood. Her disposition was so different from that of the thinker and the student, that invariably, the discovery of this fact in his nature, put her, at once, beyond his utmost sympathy.

Ondell was not altogether unconscious of this feeling. His intellect was very acute, and occultly or intuitively, it had entered his consciousness and he was sorry that the fruit of knowledge was so bitter. But he was utterly powerless to do anything against it, for in the workings of the woman's heart he was unskilled. Time, he hoped would reassure her and he must drift on with the stream of events and be satisfied with whatever came to him. He fully realized her affectional illness, without being enabled to properly diagnose its nature, or to prescribe the remedy. Not for the first time, did he have to realize that he was out of joint with his times, but deeply it came home to him now. Humanity that is left to the workings of natural selection and to the unobstructed play of its feelings, is not liable to err in these matters, but where the king has lived in his palace and but dreamed of realities, without experiencing them, the result of his rulership over himself and over the subjects of his love, was apt to be misrule.

The evening was more or less dull because there was restraint there and the philosopher and the beauty did not get on as usual. Ondell felt that he ought not to have gone this night, it was mere perverseness in him. He should have waited a few days, he need not have hurried,—but the words that ticked ever in his ears,

though he believed them to be but a delusion and the result of a process whereby his own mind had controlled some occult force within himself to move the key and thus unconsciously to him, voice his own doubts, yet to make sure, he must go this very evening and now he wished that he had been more deliberate. When he rode home,—to that home, which in its sublime gloominess, was not a fraction toward what he felt in himself, he felt as miserable as it was possible for him to feel. And his nervous organization was delicate and he was as capable of the suffering of sorrow, melancholia and pain, as he was in great and excellent degree, of thought and feeling, in other directions.

It did not please him that she was going to the city for a few weeks and even though she promised to write every day,—somehow, he did not like this. Of course, she had often gone to the city for a few weeks, there was really nothing to it, but at this time, when he felt that he was in a delicate place and had not a good opportunity of righting himself, this was most inopportune and unfortunate. He was as dissatisfied as it was possible to be. He almost felt that he would like to go with her to the city for a few weeks and he even hesitated and turned back to tell her that he would, if allowed, share her journey, only to turn again because of the impropriety of it. He might contrive to be there accidentally,—no, he was too much on his own dignity to be caught in any fool's play, nature and chance must take its own course and he must be satisfied. "Patience, patience, Ondell,

you must learn to be patient in all things, for the way before you is long and full of fretfulness," he was saying to himself half aloud. He thought often of the man who conquered himself, instead of the city. This evening, instead of lightening the gloom that set upon him, had deepened it. With a strange perversity, everything had forced him into the discussion of problems,—first Mr. Antieth,—then the school master and finally his sweetheart, seemed each glad to invite him into things up to his mental chin. He had been carried into a tedious discussion of epilepsy, *petit mal* and the like hitherto unexplained mysteries of the personality, he did not know himself how he had been induced to get into the labyrinths,—too many people liked to hear him talk, for he had the gift of the mystic realist who takes the common and ugly worm of fact and by the arts of a phosphorescent imagination, gives it the glorified aura of the glow-worm,—Ondell made the rough things shine with the wonderful glitter of his brain, the same light that comes from things dead and rotten, so it seemed to him this gloomy night. Dolee herself, as if in a spirit of pure deviltry, had led him into a brain deep discussion of several problems that he never hitherto suspected that she had as much as heard of and he hated problems,—how utterly he hated them. But he must not be rude, he had, with great good nature, tried to elucidate them. This then, was his penalty for being a master of problems. He had, since his childhood handled problems that few men ever ventured into the outskirts of and he had such ability with them, that

the farmers took delight in getting him started when they could catch him at the store of Champion City on a Saturday afternoon, and then, to be sure, he liked to be in the center of an admiring circle,—but now, indeed, the case was reversed. He had his fill of problems. She had, so it appeared to his aggravated feelings, taken a sort of taunting delight in putting one thing after the other to him, which he felt, in politeness, bound to explain. She did not, he supposed, understand many of them, even after his explanations, but it really did seem to him, from the way she talked, that she believed that he was on terms of intimate acquaintance with the inhabitants of milk and that she felt concerned about their welfare. It was possible that she had an idea of, in this manner, preparing herself to be his wife. She had read outwardly, his character and in a laudable attempt to place herself in entire sympathy with him, was seeking instruction. For that reason, he could not refuse her any information, but he would rather that she be not in sympathy with him intellectually. He desired sympathy of emotion, sympathy of the heart and soul, none of the intellect.

She misunderstood him, that was evident. He did not want a companion in his studies, he wanted her for aught else, anything to enable him to get away from the borderlands of psychical necromancy,—a new train of thought,—a home, domesticity, forgetfulness,—a change from the basis up, that he wished for as he realized, in his fond delusion, that she sought to gather interest in the things he had now begun to hate, he

was more than ever dissatisfied with himself and all his surroundings.

"It is best for her to go away for a while," he was thinking, "when she returns I will mend matters and explain it all to her. For a penny, I'd blow the blamed old barracks into the sand of the desert and begin again somewhere else. The unearned increment of my fortune will make me a lord anywhere. I do not need the old place."

Ondell was in earnest, for the hundredth time, of late, it had come to him, that he must remove himself out of these surroundings. But it was difficult to break away, so many ties bound him here and now that he had prospects of marriage, it would seem odd and even wasteful to the thrifty folk, to desert so fine a home as Thousand Stair and build another. He must conform to the prejudices of the country where thrift and economy were prime virtues. Ondell now closed the clang ing gate of the courtyard that surrounded his Mansion. From the elevation where he stood, he could look up and down the peaceful and fruitful valley of the Bourbese for miles. It seemed to wind around the hill whereon he lived, as some glittering, silver-hued serpent, in whose coils he was hopelessly bound. Could it be possible that he would ever go away from this beautiful and commanding place?

Yet he felt, that beautiful and majestic as was its situation, that it was, after the Hindoo fashion of metaphysics, a place of kamaloka and a spot that so long as he lived, would exert an influence upon him.

However, the days passed and Ondell waited im-

patiently for a letter from Dolee. None came to reassure him. There was nothing to be done, but grieve over it and wonder at what had come down between them. Sondalere came almost every night and seemed more than usually interested in the problem of nature's finer forces and tried industriously to interest Ondell in the meshes of the lucid Upanishads, but the latter would have none of it. He was gloomy and moody and in none too good a humor with Sondalere. He suspected him of intrigue, but had no reason to reproach him with anything. Sondalere had not done anything upon which he could hang the peg of a quarrel, much as he would have liked to, if for no other purpose than relieving himself of a vast amount of accumulated choler.

Sondalere had plucked up courage and called on Dolee the very next morning. He found her ready for her journey and he was discreet enough not to mention anything of the promise of the previous day. He bided his time. He would be good humored and put things right for a future killing. It was his purpose to estrange the lovers and build up an unreal barrier between them, nor did he think to reproach himself for his duplicity and treachery. He relied upon the mistaken idea that all is fair in war and in love, had anyone told him that the differences between wrecking one's bank and breaking one's heart is very small, he would have thought it a bright bit of unreality.

CHAPTER VIII.

PHILOSOPHERS AT A BARBECUE RUN FOUL OF A FOOL PHILOSOPHER AND THEREBY SPOIL THEIR PLEASURE.

In the meantime, nearly a month had elapsed and Ondell had kept closely to himself. Sondalere did not come now and no one else came. Tanton occasionally called, but Ondell was never very cordial with him, he did not like Tanton so well. He had some real affection for Sondalere at one time, but now he was not sure that he cared to continue the regard. He liked the bluff and hearty Philleo and so did every one else, for that matter,—it seemed that Ondell was not by nature affectionate, although when once aroused, his regard was lasting and true. When the annual barbecue was talked of at Champion City, Ondell was more eager for it than he had ever been,—it might offer an opportunity for getting together again, he had estranged himself from his friends entirely. He volunteered to furnish the beeves and to foot the bills if necessary. This at once set him to rights with the people and this year the feast was likely to a great success. It was advertised and guests came from all over the country. Ondell was there bright and early and a different man from what he usually was. He had made an effort to bid the past a fond farewell and to try to be, once

more, one of the boys. He sat at one of the tables and drank wine with Tanton. It was a bright forenoon and the grounds and woods were full of people. The dancing platform was already crowded and while the band played there were some who wished for Philleo, who alone could give the proper swing to the matchless hoedown. But Philleo was late. At the table where Tanton and Ondell drank, there seemed not to be any spare good humor, either. Both drank and bantered each other.

"Tanton, you are a man difficult to understand," said Ondell.

"Don't try it, it's a large order," replied Tanton.

"Here comes Sondalere and drunk already," said Ondell.

"Yeigh, here he comes, damn him, he's one of God's most truthful servants,—bah, the man makes me tired," replied Tanton.

"I thought you were chums once," said Ondell with some surprise.

"We were," he replied as Sondalere came up.

"Here's Sondalere, who looks like he belongs to the saloon subscription list,—a bad disease," he continued.

"Well, if you don't like my health, Doctor Torquay, you can prescribe for it," retorted the former, apparently not as drunk as his gait warranted.

"All right. You take this, pour out the contents and swallow the bottle," he said laughing in his cold, cynical fashion, handing him a wine bottle.

"You are a humorist, Torquay, I didn't think it was in you," answered Sondalere. "Here comes Philleo.

and Gerand, they will enjoy themselves to-day. This is their day off," said Sondalere.

"Philleo always enjoys himself, he lives in a world of delusion most of the time. Besides, his father made pretzels and that class don't worry with too much thinking," said Tanton, derisively.

"No matter about the pretzels, he's as good as some of us," retorted Ondell.

"Undoubtedly," assented Tanton, looking him ill-humoredly in the face.

"What's the difference," put in Sondalere, "he's a good fellow, even if one side of his face looks like his father and the other like his mother,—"

"Yes, and darn you," said Philleo coming up and having a good hearing, had heard what the half drunken and incautious Sondalere was saying, "and I reckon you'll say that I've got a knot on my forehead, whar the cow has her horns,—when you see a feller like that, he can generally play somethin' or other, and he's good at lookin' for trouble, too."

"You're on the bluff this morning," replied Sondalere.

"Don't you never believe it. I'm not so mild mannered this mawnin', not much,—my hoss throwed me into the middle of the wild rose clump and it ain't so durned easy for a feller to crawl out a-praisin' the Lord, now, if you see enny one, wharever and whenever you may find him, that is lookin' for service at the front, I can oblige him mighty quick."

"You are wanted at the platform to pull the tail of the horse over the entrails of the cat, that is where

you can get rid of your surplus energy," said Tanton, —highly amused at the wordy encounter.

"Naw, sir, not for me, not till I git in better sort. Gosh ermighty, how I'd do a feller this mornin'."

"Oh, you need not brag around here," said Tanton, "if you are in such a bad way for trouble, any of us here can accommodate you."

"When you do, you'll step right onto a greased plank that leads into a well," said Philleo, and the crowd laughed.

"This must be one of your Moses-in-Egypt days," interposed Ondell, "you are generally in better humor than you are. Pray be seated and help me with the wine. I'm out for a good time to-day."

"Much obliged, I'm right thar with you."

"That is right, my friend," said Sondalere, seating himself also and filling their glasses.

"Wall, Sondy, old boy, the third time's the choice, they say," said Philleo as he bumped glasses with him and winked the other eye, but Sondalere was not too drunk not to notice the allusion and he did not relish it.

"A bright young man," said the keen and alert Tanton, whose mind, had it been a razor, would have shaved stubborn faces easily, "a good insight into things."

Ondell did not understand.

"Ondell has too durned much insight," said Philleo, who, it now appeared, was much the drunkest of the lot and Tanton laughed cheerily, but to Ondell it was but the idle speech of a bibbler. Thus encouraged,

Philleo, ever ready to talk, seemed to be inclined to hold the floor for a while and Sondalere did not like to be exposed in this place and he did not know what Philleo might know of his duplicity.

"Tell us about your morning's ride, Philleo," he said, "all about that dump into the wild rose clump."

"Oh, thar's a pleasure in the pathlessful woods, our teacher used to exclaim,—the trees air so big and purty, with such good prospects for loads of walnuts and sacks of hickory-nuts and baskets full of pawpaws and your pockets full of blackhaws and your mouth full of wild grapes, that I like to go round thar and think about it. And the big old rocks with their moss tops, which air so fine to set down on, and the beautiful crick whar the minnows air twistin' around and around one another all the time and whar the birds in the trees air a whistlin', an' keepin' their eyes on the snakes, an' then the snakes, the beautiful snakes, as the poeck says, they adds spice to the 'casion by makin' you look out for them, and then thar's the mild-eyed deer——"

"For gracious sake, Philleo, pull up your stake and haul in your chain, you have gone over enough land for one day," said Tanton, laughing heartily at the unique description of nature's charms by one who ought to know them best, and Ondell seemed to appreciate it as a rare and precious effort.

"Well, tell us something else," persisted Sondalere, helping himself to the wine, whereat Ondell found it necessary to order another bottle.

"Yes, I'll tell you one," continued the irrepressible. "One time I noticed, for about two months, that my

dad was a gittin' soft and mellow and took to behavin' himself and talkin' religion. So I got scared and, ses I, Dad, for grashus sake, git to cussin' and knockin' things around agin, for I'm afraid your time is gittin' short. The old man took me at my word, and the very next day had me runnin' down the holler back of our house with a stick of wood flyin' clost behind me."

Ondell laughed, this time heartily.

"Tell us all about your visit to Ondell's house, that ought to be a capital story, from all that I can hear," said Tanton with a malicious twinkle in his eyes.

"No use in me tellin' that story, some one else's been browsin' over that field who done it wuss than I could," replied Philleo, and was silent, while Ondell felt intensely mortified at the unkind and unexpected thrust. Even Philleo, drunk as he was, had sense enough to know that he had been led into an unpleasant situation and after a moment got up and walked towards the platform, where he was soon harnessed to the first fiddle they could find for him.

Ondell's face wore a serious look. His attempts at gaiety were met with such things as this. He came here friendly to every one and determined not to make a single enemy, but every contact with his fellow man had resulted disastrously.

He had nothing more to say, and did not intend to be gay any more that day. He would, for appearance' sake, remain a while and then he would go back to his gloomy home and commune with himself. He preferred solitude and hermitage to the rough banter of his fellows. No one must make sport of him. Tan-

ton, however, felt inclined to follow up the conversation, though he waited a moment and began pleasantly and persuasively, as though inclined to make amends. But his innate sarcasm and evil mind only served to point his speech with venom and though, perhaps not so intended, every word that he said, cut into Ondell's quickened nerves like a knife.

"Ondell—come now, you wear too long a face. Did your horse balk this morning while you were sporting with your mustard stalk? The gloomiest fellow I ever met had such luck, for he had his horse strapped to a two wheeled cart and his maiden clasped to his side. Lo and behold, when they started up hill, that strap broke—the shaft went up, my friend went down. The horse up and dusted, so did my friend and so did the girl. I saw them but a moment after and their faces wore a worried look just like yours,—come now, brace up."

"Really? Well yes, I have a sombre face, why not? My face belies me not, I look to be as serious as my thoughts and they are full of concern. But, I think meanwhile, that your levity is ill designed and somewhat rude at that. Once, a fellow rattled a trap with clattering insinuation, he was a flatterer and as such, incapable of honest speech, he was a larcenist of confidences. So he flattered and sputtered and in a manner roundabout brought out his sentiments. May I add,—at which I slapped his face and that ended the argument."

"So you insinuate that I am a flatterer and a horse thief of faith and all that. And that you might box

my ears, if it pleased you? That were a doubtful experiment."

"Well, perhaps. You know me well enough. I have done worse in my time than box ears."

"In these times one has many facilities for communicating ideas and one of them may be knocking one down, but I do not advise it in this case," he said smilingly and at that moment, Ondell struck out wildly to give the slap, but Tanton dodged. Sondalere woke up, for he had been sitting in a state of collapse, with his chin on his breast.

"Here friends, no quarreling. I have sworn to keep the peace if I have to fight for it. Ondell, I'm ashamed of you."

Ondell looked at him and laughed, Tanton seemed not in the least put out by the attempted assault. Sondalere was undoubtedly seven parts drunk and began a rambling conversation, which he evidently suspected of being humorous.

"Ondell thinks he has a girl, a fair skinned, brown eyed beauty and I think what I know. I do not think what I seem to think. She might love a man like me,—why, to be sure. Tanton has the same girl, that is, he used to have her, that is, he imagined that he had her and now he imagines that he must have her back,—wouldn't that do you now? But I think what I know and I know more than I am going to tell."

"Yes," retorted Tanton, "like all other sorts, you are doing the brag act. You will have sober ideas some day and I'll be the artist to put them into you, too."

Sondalere laughed. "What do you call that but a

bluff?" But he seemed to be in reveries over the fair face and must indulge in a few commonplace endearments.

"Ah, she is a peach and a honeycomb. Those sweet ideals,—those imaginations that trace the faces on the clouds,—by the side of the turbulent sea, said the poet, there dwelt one woman and none but she,—yes, it does my heart good because she loves me,—me. I'm the elect of Israel this time. She wants a bright, energetic devil for a husband."

"Ah, that reminds me," said Tanton, sweetly, "I promised my patron saint to punish a devil for him and I had forgotten it." Without further words he gave Sondalere a powerful slap on the cheek, at which the drunken fellow was dumfounded.

"Good for you, Tanton," said Ondell, "you passed it on around, although yours didn't reach you. You are a hero to slap a drunken fellow."

"Well, he needed it on general principles," returned Tanton. Philleo had arrived by this time to rejoin them at the table. He witnessed the taking down of Sondalere and he had pertinent thoughts on the subject.

"Sondalere, you air either drunk, or a natural born fool or just a temporary lunatic—I guess that's it. You're a regular mulltom in parvo and when you git to the graveyard, which you will afore long if you mix with this crowd, save me a hambone."

"You are right, Philleo, give him thunder," added Tanton.

"Say, do you know something, old saddlebags? You

want to slack down too. Something's goin' to happen to you some day.

"You're a fool and you're a nobody. Who are you talking to?" retorted Tanton.

"Gee whizzus, listen to that clodhobber what's studied medicine. Say when you get the earth, save me a handfull." Philleo was in bad humor to-day and ready for a fight or a frolic.

Ondell had gone off to himself, not wishing to be mixed up in a fight with these rude fellows. He was quite accustomed to free rows at the annual barbecue, it was nothing out of the usual order, but he need not have part in this one. "I think I begin to understand my rollicking friend, Sondalere," he was thinking to himself; "he is telling tales out of school. He has intentions and I must beware of him, for Dolee was too free with him. He is a dangerous man, and to think that I had him for a friend and confidant. I will trust no one in this."

Almost unexpectedly, he ran into Philleo who was looking up at the bright sun from the outskirts of the barbecue.

"Yes, I got out too. Tanton and Sondalere air not my kind of people. I'm too honest to dig dirt with them." said he.

"I suppose you are studying astronomy while you can see well," said Ondell laughing.

"No I'm curin' my hay fever while the sun shines."

"Only aristocrats have that, Philleo."

"Well, I'm one of them."

"Say, where did you go after you left the cavern, that night you came to see me?"

"Go? Why I kept on going until next day."

"But which way? Where did Dolee go?"

"How the devil do I know?"

"Did she go with you?"

"No, I resigned my membership before she left."

"You left her and Sondalere together?"

"Didn't I? You kin bet your socks on that."

"Where did they go after they left my place?"

"God knows."

"Then you know nothing?"

"Not a thing."

"Sure enough?"

"Sure enough."

"Oh, you're not so foolish, you know something. Did she get home at all?"

"I heard them say that she was thar for breakfast. I know that I got thar in time for supper, that's all I know."

"Where were you all night?"

"Oh, I thought it a good time to hunt coons."

"You caught some?"

"No, they wouldn't bite."

"Honestly, did Miss Dolee tell you anything next day?"

"Oh yes, she told me a whole lot. What a nice feller Sondalere was. Said she was drowsy and looked like she'd been drinkin'. That's why, I says, my dear, you air not so peart as you generally air and she said

I was too all-fired consarned about her welfare for my own good. That's what I generally get from her."

"But she's a good girl, is she not?"

"Oh my, yes. And purty ain't no name for it. You ought to see her since she come back. She's got a dress now that's a dream in cream."

"Ah, she has returned?"

"She's back, that's the way it appeals to me."

"Is she coming here to-day?"

"Yes, she'll be here later, in the afternoon."

Philleo went back to the platform then in response to loud calls for him. The band had broken down somewhere. Ondell felt a sudden elation. The day was not without its charm. The long, vast whisper of rain ceased to stir the sleeping maples. There was nothing upon his soul that reproached him. He must be the lord of the day and the charm of his highly intelligent manhood must have its winsome play this afternoon.

That afternoon was a long time a-coming.

CHAPTER IX.

SONDALERE AND DOLEE HAVE ANOTHER MEETING AND WIND UP THEIR LOVE AFFAIR WITH AN ELOPEMENT.

Sondalere and Gerand sat under a tree where they could enjoy the scene before them, without being disturbed by its noise. Both had come out of a mellow drunkenness and foreswore another for that day. Sondalere had learned that Dolee was to come at three o'clock and that immediately sobered him. The tree under which he sat, stood in the direction from which she was to come and he was there as the man on the haystack was, on the day of judgment,—a little nearer than the others.

Gerand, who could occassionally tell a story, was rambling along in a fashion and had he lived in a remoter age, might have impinged on the domain of a celebrated liar.

“Dick was the name of that mule and there was no mistake about it, Dick was in love with timber. I was told that in his youngest days he lived in a forest where he had grass in summer and dry leaves and twigs in winter, up in the bleak north where the hazel splitter originated the adage of root hog or die. Dick had too much stubbornness to give up his ghost to hunger, so, with the energy born of immense necessity, he took to eating wood. Men and dogs might arrive at some

far off elysium after the fitful fever, but the mule is a hybrid and not on the program. So Dick eat a tough fare and lived. When in happier days he was transported to the evergreen south it was difficult to eradicate early habits and he remained true to the wood, whenever he got good wood. When I got him he fixed his sedate eyes horizontally and good wood struck him as being plentiful. I left a bucket of water for him and it evaporated, all but the hoops. Buckets full of oats went down and the hoops alone remained behind. That aroused my suspicions. Then the neighboring fence lost its standing. The palings were chewed off and finally the neighbors caught on and used to gather around to watch Dick finish a piece of tender cordwood. It was more fun than a circus. Dick's skin was uncommonly tough and his hair stood out like bristles. Then it seemed that he got more timber abroad than was good for him, but like a drunkard, he stuck to the habit and wood was cheap. One day, however, we were all surprised and so was Dick while it lasted. He found a box of matches and after he had eaten them he looked to be uneasy and begun to run wild. Then he honkey honked, rubbed against the fence, rolled over and we knew that he was in distress. Then he up and run to the water trough and plunged his head in and that is the only thing that left us a memento of him, the rest of him fell into ashes."

"By jimminy! Save the others for to-morrow."

"I'll bet you're waiting here for that young lady," said Gerand, suddenly.

"Well? Wouldn't you? but you need not go and tell

Tanton and Ondell that I am trying to head them off. It's none of your funeral."

"Of course not. What do you take me for? I suppose you mean to treat her on the square?"

Sondalere laughed at the exquisite appropriateness of the question.

"You're all right, Gerand, a fine moralist."

"Well, to be sure, I am. She's a nice girl, and I didn't mean anything out of the way. In fact, she's out with Tanton, I hear, and she may be in with you for all I know. I like to see young girls well treated, I'm not so particular about the old ones. You may not believe it, but my own dear mother was a sweet girl once and for her sake I always respect young women. But when they get old and are more'n likely to take their good things to the graveyard without any one getting any benefit out of it, I am not so particular."

"Yes," said Sondalere. "Often we think what is another's, is ours also,—that we may with reasonable privilege trespass upon others. Young men grow up with an idea that if they can circumvent some woman, it is no wrong. But it seems to me that it is essential to the maintenance of society, that the sacredness of the family should not be disturbed. Young men should be educated as to what is rightly theirs and what is rightly some one else's. Some men have certain kinds of ideas,—some have other ideas. There is one kind of thinking that society recognizes as the right kind and another that is set aside as the wrong kind. One cannot say how small a thing will set wrong the cur-

rent of a man's thought. An idle word, a careless example sets the whole life awry. If a young man belongs to that plane where vice is indirectly held to be respectable and where female conquests are evidences of smartness, then what can you expect of this class of young men? It seems to me, that the earliest thoughts of youth ought to be inculcated in the Sunday school, so that one may grow up with a good bias,——”

“Oh, lord, yes,” sighed Gerand, “you stick to the Sunday school for a while, I'm going back to the dance and to the ways of the devil.”

Sondalere looked at his watch. “It is almost time. I will chance it and ride to meet her.”

He rode along leisurely and though, after a while, he saw her coming, he appeared not to see her, until she was at his side and had playfully reined his horse.

He looked up in a surprised way and with as sweet a smile as he could muster. There was something very genial in his smile. It drew one into entire sympathy. It was innocent, persuasive and melancholy.

“Good evening, my friend, how goes the merry feast?”

“I was sad,” said Sondalere, “for the feast is in a ferment and there is talk of fights without end. All are drunk and I came away and as I rode I forgot myself entirely—you are as unexpected as welcome, Miss Dolee.”

“Had I best not go?”

“Not now. It is unsafe. Let the wild, cold and

cruel brawlers have their time of it, I wish ways of gentleness."

"And I."

"Turn back and we will ride along the brook and graze our horses under the shady trees, we may pass a pleasant afternoon, may we not?"

"As you wish," she replied, and they turned aside into the cool woods for the afternoon was sweltry and idled along the still, glorious woodland, decked in endless greenth, beautiful beyond anything of a man-made earth. They were together there more than two hours and the hours passed by easily and hurriedly. They were surprised to learn how the time had passed. The hours were to them, fraught with something of momentous interest. They had renewed their recent vows and the influence of Sondalere was complete. The time and place for wooing, the hour for the magic of his art, all conspired to give him the potency of the master. Sondalere was not without interest, he had some excellent qualities and his skill as a hypocrite was not to be despised. He could borrow money on what he seemed to be. "What is the use, my friend," he had said, "of moping around the world, when there are thousands of fine men from whom to choose. Ondell—noble, brave fellow, to be sure, but not at all suited to you. I am a practical man and a readable one. You will repent of Ondell and more so of Tanton, but I am nearer to your nature than either. I am candid. I have not the grace to cover my thoughts. What is in me comes to the surface.

"Yes, I know,—you do not wish to wrong him, but

he ought not to be allowed,—unconsciously, perhaps, to wrong you. One day it will be too late. You will not become accustomed to that mixture of gloom and mysticism. It has roots that reach to the deep places of the earth. You cannot enter this life in spirit and he can not get away from it."

"What would you really suggest, Mister Son-dalere?"

"My first suggestion is that you do not call me mister. You must put me nearer. My next is that I have nothing to suggest. I am talking,—that is all. You ought to know him. His manner is that of the icebox. I will not take it upon myself to suggest anything, other than that you marry me. Ondell doubts us all, even you. He said,—"

"He told you that he doubted me?"

"Why,—yes, I believe he did. Yes, he intimated that your sincerity was to be questioned. He had had a talk with Tanton,—"

"He believed Tanton? Did he,—"

"Come now, we must not provoke harsh feelings."

"Tell me what he said."

"No, it is not my business to make enemies or tell tales out of school, I did not intend anything of the kind."

"It slipped from you? Sometimes we unwittingly tell the truth."

"Pardon me. Let us cut the knot by riding over the county line and when we return it will surprise the natives."

Dolee felt piqued and yet full of cheerfulness. She

half consented to it, and Sondalere took the reins of her horse and rode on, smiling at her in his bewildering fashion, so that resistance was well nigh useless. Blinely she was led on into fate, perhaps not more blinely than thousands of others pass weekly into active life, and win or loose at the lottery. A subtle calm lay on this summer's afternoon and Sondalere rode on swiftly with his lady at his side.

Suddenly Tanton rode into sight and it seemed that, with almost instinct, he divined that all was not as it should be. Whatever it was, Tanton had a wonderfully penetrative intellect,—so keen that his judgment was in consequence quite dwarfed. He read one at a glance and then knew not what to do with the knowledge.

“You cowardly shrimp!” said Tanton, hotly, “for a minute consideration I’d break your head with my whipstock.”

“Well, I don’t know,” drawled Sondalere, “I never violate proprieties by indulging in a fight in the presence of a lady.”

“Nor any other time. You could not be induced to do it. You are too refined to settle anything squarely, in any way,—you hairlipped, corkheaded, goatfaced, hogeared,—” there was no knowing how far Tanton would have gone with rich expletives, had not Sondalere broken him off with a keen laugh, as he turned to Dolee and remarked, “Tanton thinks I am foolish enough to be provoked into a fight to-day, but I am too well off to disturb the statu quo. Tomorrow,—next

week, when I am less engrossed, he may try again and I'll try to give him as good as he sends."

"You are a,——" but he stopped, for his breeding held good and so far it seemed that Sondalere was the better bred.

"I am surprised at you, Tanton, for a man of your bringing up to use such language in the presence of a lady."

"Oh yes, certainly," he replied, "you are bound to be right to-day. We shall see each other about this later."

"When, I hope it will be rather late to see about it," laughed Sondalere.

"It will not be too late for me" answered Tanton, moodily.

"You'd waste time on it after our marriage. Go on, you'll survive it and it will not trouble you next week. It cannot be helped anyway and it will do you no good to wish us ill. We have made up our minds, friend Tanton,—and it is as good as done and concluded, so make the most of it and come to the infair."

"I thank you for your advice. It is valued at precisely what it cost me. Certainly, certainly,—but, of course my getting even with you need not interfere with this day's program. Any time in a year will do me."

"Our friend has quite a prolonged determination,—to hear him talk," said Sondalere, turning to Dolee in order to purposely ignore Tanton.

"Yes, and as sure as I live your sneer will wail yet with the agonies of death."

"I suppose you were as persistent as this in your attentions to Eloine Terren," replied Sondalere unexpectedly and Tanton turned white, but only for a moment.

"I should say so," said Dolee, who had been silent hitherto.

"That will do, Sondalere, it adds insult to injury!"

"Truth is mighty and makes the guilty wail," answered Sondalere.

"You cur! You take a mean advantage of your situation to abuse me."

"It is not true then?"

"No, I'd kill you, I'd kill you for less than that!" said Tanton angry as it was possible for him to be, for he could contain his anger well.

"It would be profitless, friend Tanton,—profitless. I shall soon have a wife to support and you have one de facto that you ought to be supporting instead of flirting with another man's sweetheart,—"

"You are a cur! You are a coward!"

"And one that hounds an innocent girl until he takes all that she has and then casts her to the contumely of the world, is a gentleman and a brave man, is he?"

Tanton was insulted beyond words. He raised his hand as though to strike and Dolee raised her hand also and called him by name. "Tanton! Tanton!" There was a strange power of command in the woman's voice, he felt stricken into obedience.

"Tanton, for the sake of the past and for the honor of a gentleman, which you are, notwithstanding your faults, pass by and let us go our way."

He looked at her with wavering eyelids.

"You have decided upon this deliberately?"

"I have."

"Then let it be. And remember that ye have me to reckon with, even to every infamy."

"Forgive me," she asked pleadingly, "wish me happiness, will you not?"

"No! I place a curse upon you instead!"

"Come, let us be going. Ben Leach is at home at this hour."

Ben Leach was the Baptist preacher who lived across the county line.

"Yes, we must be going," said Dolee.

"Then go!" said Tanton savagely and he turned as one utterly rent in his soul and bruised and bleeding in his heart,—as one sickened to death,—impotent in every nerve and crushed by hopelessness. He had always trusted that someday he would again win the amiable Dolee and this parting from her was a great trial. He rode slowly down the hill, his head upon his breast and his body limply in the saddle,—the defeated victim of a desperate devotion.

A man's devotion is apt to parallel that of his other emotions. Tanton loved desperately and in every other way, the bent of his mind was wilful to stubbornness.

While in the main, his feelings were sinisterly, it did not appear that his feelings towards Doleah Antieth were other than they ought to have been. Some one he must surely love with all the depth of his passionate nature and Doleah was the goddess of

his sole devotions. He regretted a thousand times that his sin had found him out, not for the sin itself but because it had separated him from the goddess that he loved. He had even in his lonely hours wept over his failings and sighed that this had come to him. So he rode on unmindful of all. Evening threw its folds upon the forests, yet the surly, melancholy Tanton rode on not caring whither he went or what became of him. He wandered again in the wild grassy vale and his soul saw the night with its shadows fall. The rustling of the leaves bestirred by the zephyrs of the evening, the lurid flash of the fire-flies, the chirp of the katydid, the falcon voice of the nightingale and he heard again as of old, the whippoorwill call. His heart reawoke to the memories of days departed, the days when he was a lover and the thoughts of that time were, as if stealing over him, no, no,—he awakened with a start as one that falls o'er the precipice in his dream, no, no,—on the years was laid a strange hand, that beckoned the dead to rise up from the dust and as if,—from the stretches of an infinite quiet of time, came something and that something was the cup bearer of reproach.

He had not been true to his trusts. He repented him of his silken treacheries, a few tears came on his cheek and then, for a moment, he was, as if touched by the chord of an infinite song, a vision came and of love as pure as the driftings of snow and as chaste withal, one glimpse of paradise, then he threw off the stupor of that dim, angelic moment and was again a devil in the world of cold materialism.

Nothing was left for him but to make the most of all things and of all men and especially of all women. His love for Dolee had been the noblest that his soul had ever borne and he held himself to it, as the one thing that bound him to life with the strength and persistency of life itself. No nearer to paradise might he ever come, in verity, she held the key to his salvation,—fate willed otherwise. This haunted him until he had become a monomaniac on the subject and pursuing him as it did, it could not end other than with the ending of his life. And from that time on, when apparently, she was lost beyond recovery, his desire to possess her by fair means or foul, became the one note that led the inharmony of his life.

CHAPTER X.

WHEREIN ONDELL AND PHILLEO EXCHANGE CONFIDENCES AND THE FORMER GETS STARTLING NEWS.

As the afternoon wore on, Ondell became more and more impatient and in his anticipations passed weary hours. At length, he wandered far into the woods, in hopes, that when he returned, he might have the pleasure of meeting her. He had looked everywhere for Philleo, but that worthy had disappeared and what he knew of his mistress, Ondell wished to learn. It was likely, thought he, that Philleo had tried a jest on him. To his surprise, he found him in the woods, evidently in the same mood as himself.

"Well," said Ondell, and he felt like calling him a last year's cabbage stalk or some other pet name, "what are you doing here? The picnic is over there."

"No'k, the picnic I'm lookin' for is down thissaway. I'm searchin' up a runaway,—one that's just found what's she been a-lookin' for. You see anybody like that? The leading officer in the flight was with her, an' it's hell, I'm tellin' you."

"What are you driving at? You go around your elbow to your thumb, why don't you begin to have some sense?"

"How can I? We jayhawkers can't learn anything,—and don't forgit that you're one of us. Josh goes

'round with his cork heel boots on, havin' a slit down the middle of the tops an' a pant leg hung in either slit, a white handkerchief made of silk 'round his neck an' a big hat on one ear, a twisted hoss shoe nail round one finger an' a swollertail coat. Josh does the callin' off, an' when he jumps out 'nto the middle of the floor and then straight up for about two feet a-poppin' his heels together, it's fall in partners. Then Philleo and Charley Warden and us fellers, can sit on a plank crost two old nail kags in the fireplace, whar the dancers can't git our toes and the fun begins. Say, you know, I'd ruther be out to Panky Hollow, Fizzlespring, Longbeard valley and the Heelstring nation any time, than at these blamed barbecues. Over thar, when the boys want to dance, they notify some of the old folks to git out of the way, then they put the kitchen, what there is of it, into the smoke house and pull up the bed stakes and lay the cabin bare. The old folks stays with the neighbors that night and we holds the house down. A barrel of cider on the old sawbuck out in the yard and both doors of the cabin swung out so that in case of too much tumult inside, we can all git out in a hurry. An' my partner, red headed, freckled and clod faced, who'd a been a world's wonder if he'd had a professor when he was young, would play the sweet by and by, until you'd melt into water, an' me a playin' the tune representin' the old man an' the old woman quarrelin' again, don't you forgit it, give me the old hoedown everytime. Darn your high fangled barbecues. Here there, you Jack Smoot, come way from there now, says a feller and unless Jack'd

come off from too much proximity to some gentle Ruhanna or Millian, thar is a knockdown an' dragout. That's the way they do it,—here, a fine fellow sneaks up, when you ain't a-lookin',—that's civilization. That's what's happened this afternoon. Gimme your simple swain an' your peach painted gal, until the time comes for them to move out for a night and let their own youngsters own the cabin, that is whar I'm goin' to spend my honeymoon. Since you fellers come here an' build big old houses and got your dances into the open air in the broad of the day, there ain't no fun in this country."

"See here, what the deuce are you giving me?"

"Say, do you know that you are a crank?" He traced an imaginary circle.

"Who said that?"

"Oh, it belongs to the neighborhood. You're gettin' to be like me, a free hoss in the lot, a free hoss on the world wide prairie and they laugh at you, you havin' money they laugh out left, me havin' none, they laugh outright. I'm done. I play no more, I'm goin' into the backwoods."

"Pshaw, what a fool you are!"

"Wall, I don't know. My noble badge of ancestry is a scrubbin' brush, an' sometimes scrub stock comes to the front, an' sometimes it gets riled too."

"You're gettin' away from the main thing. I'll bet you've got two empty bottles in those stovepipes you wear around your legs."

"Wall, when I'm a huntin' snakes, I wear elbows on my feet and goodlicker inside. Gosh er mighty,

how I'd do a feller right now. Course, I ain't no claims on her, still I can't help feelin' lost."

"Too deep for me."

"Guess again."

"The first thing you know I'll clear off your top-knot by pulling out some of that yellow hair, tell me what you know and stop your drunken trifling."

"Oh well, gee whizzus, don't take it so hard. You can't take a hint, then you'll have to take the consequences. Dolee went with the perfesser to get married."

"Go on, you ought not to jest so."

"Hard to believe, ain't it? When my dad was good natured, he'd tell me that I was smarter at twenty than he was at forty, he'd tell me that because it was easy for me to believe it, sorry I can't do as well by you, but facts, you know. Oh yeigh,—A wind went rollin' through the sky, it bent the limb and twisted the twigs. An' a big sunflower bent in the breezes, that blowed the leaves from off the treeses."

"Stop your nonsense, I'm tired of it."

"Well, she said that she was tired of bein' fooled and didn't care to be a nun just to please a lot of boys that didn't know their own minds."

"You are not serious?" Ondell began to feel some alarm.

"I ain't? I tell you she rode off with Sondalere across the county line to Ben Leach's to get married, an' I'm out of a job. If you know a place whar sense an' cunnin' air in demand, put me thar."

"Confound you, I want to brain you!"

"You try that on some feller what's supposed to have them things. As fur as I can see, your name is dirt in sign board letters an' I'm so sorry!" Philleo ended with a great sigh and Ondell knew then that he was in earnest. He turned away without another word and something like a feeling of death entered his heart. He walked back slowly to the scenes of revelry and the day was done. The bonfires were already lighted near the platform and the dancers were gay and boisterous. He went to his horse and slowly mounting him, rode off, having no parting hand for anyone,—verily, he had not any friends and all his acquaintances were traitors.

It seemed to him, after a while, that Tanton rode up alongside of him with the stealth of a cat. He had not heard any sound until he felt a hand on his shoulder and turned in great surprise to meet the doctor.

"What?" he asked, thoroughly taken aback.

"Nothing. Good evening, that's all. I saw you riding along and I thought I would ride with you."

"Thank you and glad to have you. I trust that we are good friends again?"

"We were never at outs, my dear sir, don't suppose that I mind your little antics, not at all."

"Considerate of you and also just. I am often rude, my heart is usually in the right place. I love my fellow-man more than my manner would indicate."

"Yes, my friend, your heart is infinitely tender and kind, I know that you are a good man, quick to resent, quick to forgive, as swiftly as you would strike down your insulter, you would jump in the river after him

under other circumstances, and knowing this, my feelings towards you are tenderer than you imagine. I have always had a peculiar admiration for you."

"I appreciate your compliments and will remember them. You know that you are always welcome to my house and what I have is freely at your disposal."

"Thank you. I suppose you are aware of the dastardly thing that was done this evening?"

"Yes, I was told by Philleo that Sondalere and Dolee went to the parson's, I suppose it is true?" he asked regretfully.

"Yes," answered Tanton, not less sadly than his companion,—and it was a strange picture that the two gracefully aggressive men presented as they rode along, having, as it were, a common sorrow and growing tender towards each other. They could appreciate each other's feelings, they were intelligent beyond the humdrum of everyday, a high class sympathy came between them and gave them a psycho-cognition, or perhaps, each cared little what the other said and unconsciously played at subtle hypocrisy. The natural indifference of Ondell might have led him into this almost imperceptible dishonesty,—for Tanton, it was second nature, one might have taken whole blocks of his past and made good pitch out of it.

"I saw them riding together and accosted them. "Good evening, friends, which way? What news? Disturbing thus the evening dews, would I might ride out with a maid a rambling through the leafy shade, pray tell me where your journey ends, I would go

NOTE.—Psycho-cognition. The wisdom of the soul.

there, if welcome. But our artful enemy replied after a fashion, that he loved to ramble amid the swinging vines, in the wild-wooded ways where the leaf mulch gathers and the bird flitted from bough to bough, that it filled his heart with dreams and the drowsy dreams did free his soul from pain. Then I smiled on and scarce suppressed a sneer and I looked on the fair maiden at his side, then he went on to say that it was fairer still to have so sweet a lady at his side, not only eye and ear,—but heart,—that something which speaks the longing found in every man, might then have its satiation."

"A beautiful picture, friend Tanton, and what else?"

"Then the lady answered for herself, that so it was for her, that she was not alone, in insinuation to us, friend Ondell,—us lonely, thinking men,—she is to be pitied,—she wants at her age, the parrot and the puppy. She declared that she had now a friend who had always a kindly answer. And might it not be sometime otherwise? Never, and her faith was something marvelous. Alone, the scene might pall, she said, but passed with one you love, no scene is ever dreary. And how truly, she went on to say, should we value those, who show in every little, 'tentive grace, a love that adds a halo to each time and place. Thus, it was that she rode on, enwrapt in her choice company."

I was doubly sad, though not so much for myself as for you, friend Ondell. Gently, I tried to admonish her with all the poor art I had, that she sang a song in answer to a siren that thrilled a yearning melody upon the rock bound reefs by a treacherous sea of moral

death, but she passed my gentle suasion with sneering by. And though it has been many days since I held a small place in her affections, still there came a numbness to my heart. She listened then no more to me but took her way and as evening fell with its shadows o'er the highway, she turned and followed her impatient puppy. So it was, friend Ondell, that a better thing than the average, ended in the misery of the commonplace, the great rose of the diadem fills an empty bottle on a mere broker's desk,—damn it, such is life!"

"I thank you, friend Tanton, indeed I do. Had I that charm of infinite delight,—words that drip and drag in sweetest melody, my suit had fared me better. There is nothing for us, save to pity her, world-wide, everlasting pity."

"None of your Christian pity for me,—no other cheek,—no waiting for a reunion in heaven, I am a votary of the doctrines that it is the business of some persons to germinate the seeds of sorrows and such sorrows as bring retribution. One shall the other avenge, cheerfully we take the burden from the shoulders of Almighty God and some of us know our business,—they shall experience that,—subtle, unperceived, but generous, generous, swift, sure and infallible."

"Why would you?"

"Ten thousand years of inheritance is a great enough riddle, I cannot answer you, I am here to pay debts and every man to his business,—nonetheless, I regret that I must do this." The strange man appeared to be sorry that nature had fashioned him so.

"Tanton, let us not worry over the mischance of life. We shall miss the last kiss of a dying bride, what we loved, a shadow was and as a shadow fled. She often spoke of you, I thought sometimes that she might go back to you, but I had never a suspicion of Sondalere. Now, that it is done, I am half inclined to be merry. I am made a fool of,—so what's the difference?"

"Well, of course, philosophy and stoicism are excellent. I leave you here, good night."

"Goodnight!" Without further ado, after the manner of country people, Tanton took a fork of the road.

Ondell neared his own home and for a wonder it seemed a companionable place once more. How gaily the light shone! The windows were bright, the servants awaited the master and lonely as he was, some waited for him at least. But the feeling was momentary and was soon dispelled. Deeper than ever the gloom settled upon him and as he tossed the rein to his man and entered the house, wherein she, the truant lady, might have reigned a queen,—she, who was, perhaps at this hour, in the arms of another to be loved and caressed by him,—his emotions overcame him and he sought his room to weep. For a long time he sat there and the wind seemed to moan and sigh, a cloud hung black, the rain came down to cast its gentle curse over the stolen nuptials,—a shadow indeed, hung over the world, that darkened it forevermore.

Almost mechanically, under the impulse of the moment, he lifted the trap door and reaching down lighted the gas jets. One by one they sprang into life,

far down into the earth, like stars that lighted the way to another world. For the moment he admired the picture as if it had strange, brilliant fascination for him and then he descended into Cavern Hall for the last time. He had come to bid it farewell and to-morrow he would turn from it and perhaps years might come and go and the young grow old and the old lie underneath the all absorbing soil, ere the country of his childhood might know him again.

The idea of going away was now definitely fixed in his mind and he carried it with him and the influence of it went out from him to the intelligences of the Cavern, for almost the moment he came to the pavement, a discord broke upon the stillness and as he walked towards the bier of his father, apparitions seemed to come out of space and stand around him. Much as he had always refused to believe that the phenomena was other than that of his own thought-form, giving a weird, though recognizable shape to some scarce substantial vapor of astral light,—luminiferous ether,—some phase of etherial substantialism,—he could not bring himself, this night, into his habitual frame of doubt. Things, light as undulating clouds of smoke, that came when he sat in his study, amid the intoxicating gases of the vintage and the stupefiant pipe,—yet bearing an expression of knowingness, a reality so strenuously intense, that he stood still and wondered, if indeed, this world that danced before him, was a real world, where men and women, bereft almost of forces, yet held personality and in thin

outlines, barely visible and nothing worth, yet trifled uselessly in the aura of the earth's influences.

Then a vision came upon him of mountains wrapped in dense, awful clouds, where tall, bare trees shivered as the blasts of winter cut them through, storms rolling on in sheets of flame and as suddenly, it all melted into gentle evening, where the cooing of birds was heard and a cloud of lurid, grayish light lay gracefully, like some insubstantial veiling of silver threads weft in a loom beyond the fineness of the ken of man, upon the greenest of flower-decked valleys—a hallowed draping to a restful scene. *

He saw himself stand upon the highways of the night, amid a blending of shadows so doubtfully revealing something of immarcessible gloom. Then again, a picture like a troubled dream unsealed itself and from the gathering darkness had its birth. Then came the far stretched scene of a wind-blown mountain pass, that like a negative touched dimly on his brain, seemed to be cast out upon the mingled shades. And, two, it seemed, beneath the storm were falling, up where the wind blown, rock rent passes of the mountain rose. He held with death a reverie, a sainted lass seemed to return to his embittered thoughts again and it was night and day and twilight and sunrise to him then—the visions of his life he seemed to halt, as they sought fleetingly the dreamer's paradise. A light that came afar then seemed to fill the scene with mystery partaking of the deepening night and again his heart was touched as with enduring memory,—he felt a depth not understandable,—of things he could not reason

with,—as one indeed, who knew not how or why, in the darkness of his time and place.

He looked down and then around. He seemed to stand alone and felt an elation of soul and a desire to laugh,—at that moment the tears trickled down his cheek and everything around him had become so mysterious that he trembled for himself.

He had, in truth become alarmed. His experiences were too many, his emotions too deep, his weak flesh was becoming to be unequal to the task, either he must soon go into that wonderful realm within whose borderland he had long been a dweller or he must leave it all forever and live the flesh,—live the flesh.

When a moment later the flushing of light renewed and, as it were, the warmth and beauty of sunshine filled the place, he found himself more quiet and he recalled the vision that he had seen. Far up in the wind blown mountain pass he had seen the counterfeit of himself. The long, wavy dark hair of the woman he knew, for she who bore it was rounded out in all the delicate lines of beauty,—the breath of earth filled her breast and his heart went out to her,—she that was lost this day in the meshes of the flesh of earth. A hunger gleamed in his glad eye and it seemed as if the gift of prophesy came upon him. A sense of gloaming came upon him also and his quickened blood grew sluggish. When he saw again the faces that braved the storm, in the rock rent mountain pass, their faces were cold, white and set. Eagerly he bent forward and saw that the pair drifted apart, one lay as if bleached by the hand of death, the other seemed hid-

den away under the stones of a dungeon. A mad excitement seized him,—an involuntary cry came from him,—his own voice heightened the fear that he felt. It was a sound that made succeeding stillness awful. It was simply beyond the bounds of thought. He tried bravely to remember happier things, to stand firm and wear off the awful sense that had seized him and that, which he almost knew to be the first herald of blank insanity. “I will leave this accursed place,” he said, “I will leave this place,” he repeated, “I will go away and forget, I will go and forget.”

Tremblingly and half out of his senses, he hurried away and dragged his weary limbs up the stairs,—up to the flat roof of his mansion, where the light shone out upon the valley and the winds of a summer night blew free and balmily.

He walked about in the starlight to relieve himself of the intense sense of oppression. Lately the rain had fallen, now the air was fresh and wholesome. “Pshaw, pshaw!” he exclaimed, “What a fool, what a fool I am! I grieve and think and weep over the imaginary sorrows of the world and death waits at the end of the lane.

“It is soon to the end of the lane and here a misanthrope and a dreamer of the orgies of the damned, I live. No,—no, I will go away and live in the fullness of the flesh and drown out the keen nerve in the lusts of the flesh and fill the stomach and gratify the senses and hasten on to the end of the lane in the dreamy lethe of a rich warm blood,—I will live!” His voice had risen almost to an exclamation and his man ap-

peared in the yard below, wondering what was the matter somewhere.

That completely recalled him to his senses and he went below to his study.

Late that night the servants were awakened by the sound of hammering and as they stole, one by one, on tiptoe and peered in through the narrow opening left by the door ajar, they saw the master of the mansion industriously nailing down a trap door.

With long spikes and with a good blow he sent them into the floor and at last expressed his satisfaction that the work was well done and though knowing their master's many moods, they were surprised at this, as they stole back to their rooms and wondered, if indeed, the gentle and silent Ondell was in full enjoyment of all his faculties.

But more so was the surprise, when the next day, Tanton came in response to a messenger sent by Ondell and later he announced to them that he went for a journey indefinitely,—that Tanton would henceforth be the master of the house and that their pay would not be delayed because of his absence.

And he bade them all farewell and that evening he rode with Tanton many miles to the railway station and Tanton alone returned, leading one horse and riding the other.

CHAPTER XI.

TANTON TORQUAY MEETS ELOINE TERREN WHO HAS
SOME WRONGS WHEREWITH TO REPROACH HIM.

On the evening after Ondell Urmoden had taken his departure, Tanton Torquay sat on a stump at the base of the hill, whereon stood the Mansion of a Thousand Stairs and his face wore a satisfied look. He liked his new home. Its large and visible grandeur suited his vanity. He might lord it over the country for a while, he knew not how long. Ondell would not soon return and if he ever did, there might be another story,—not to tell. He respected all men according to their balance at the bank and he hoped soon to respect himself similarly. He was satisfied with his material progress and possession was nine points at least. He communed with himself and in an exalted fashion.

“Every dog has his day” he was thinking, “but I have never had mine. It has been struggle, always striving. When I yearned for education and my father could have given it to me, I had to slave for it instead. When I wished a profession I had to fight hard for it. Whenever a great success seemed as if about to come, the most exasperating reverses knocked it hollow. Whatever I have done for myself, has been done in the heat of the battle and a battle with enemies, untoward circumstances and starvation. Who shall

say that my will is not a wonderful will or that because, in my intense determination, I must have or destroy, that I am altogether bad? No, by the gods, the flag of Tanton still flies at the helm! Come good or evil, come what will, I go down only when I am sure that I cannot survive another moment! Then have pity that in some things I am measured to the standard of greatness,—fate has been unkind to me."

He sat there in his boastful reveries and what he said in extenuation of himself was not untrue. He had striven against all odds and he would strive to the bitter end.

"Damn it, I'll kill that carrion flesh! I'll break loving hearts! I'll passport them to hell! They have crossed me where the heart is sore and the memory is forever keen and I'll be revenged. My friend and my enemy, them will I remember and their children after them!"

In the crepuscule of evening the form of a woman appeared farther below him where a gentle ridge rose from the valley.

"No, damn it, here is my Nemesis! Whenever I feel good and whenever I think that fortune is favoring me, she rises on the perspective and down comes my kite!"

"My dear Tanton," said the lady as she neared him, "my dear Tanton, I am glad to see you this evening." said Eloine Terren.

"Of course. And I regret to say that I am not much in the humor of it. Where do you go?"

"Anywhere, the world is wide."

"So it is."

“And you?”

“I live here now. Ondell has gone a journeying and I hold the fort.”

“I am glad for you. And you may now find some time for me?”

“Well, I do not know.”

“Tanton, if you but knew the heart you throw away, the heart with its deep and tender love for you,—”

“Yes, yes, I know it, but then so much love is wasted annually that it is hard to keep track of it.”

“Disturbing shocks by day and dismal dreams by night,—”

“Exactly, I have them both. I get a devil of a shock now and then expecting you to turn up in the oddest of places and at most inopportune moments, and as for dismal dreams, I have the gloomiest on record. You persist to me greatly, really a little absence might make the heart grow fonder.”

“There is nothing else for me than to haunt you.”

“Teach the village school more industriously and give me a chance to turn around.”

“I do my duty in that respect and I do more for yours than you do for it.”

“Yes, you’d sell your life for it.”

“Indeed?”

“And perhaps no thanks you get for it.”

“None,—not from the blood of Tanton. Shall a child reproach its mother for selling her virtue to buy food for it? My child, having the blood of Tanton may do that.”

"Hush, woman, no child will do that, not mine at least. I am a grateful man in all things."

"Yes, truly grateful. You have failed, I learn in your latest enterprise, and Sondalere has been keen enough to trip you up? You would scarcely admit it."

"Because of you."

"Because of me is a good cause. A dishonestly born son is a good cause. But first of all it was because of yourself."

"Hush, woman, you but publish your scandal."

"It is nailed to the cross. It is nailed on the high hill in the public place. Unless you legitimatize us, we are Hagar and Ishmael turned into the desert."

"Oh, we will come to that sooner or later. I tell you that if you give me a chance to get on in the world, I'll treat you fairly."

"But not honestly. I would regain my honor again. Oh, precious pearl that once was mine, how carelessly, in an evil moment I failed to esteem your value!"

"Honor is a bauble. Have peace, it is a moment on on the lip of notoriety, it counts for nothing. Tomorrow the great are down in the mire of the depths,—it is a trifle merely."

"No, it is not a bauble, not a trifle. God has given to us a sense of rectitude and a love of honor. For a great purpose in a great plan, the exquisite sense of justice and of right thinking and correct living is implanted in us and in the coming of civilization, the family of man rises higher and higher up to it always."

"How religious you are!"

"Woman heralds every rise in civilization, she feels

the force that come and gives it to the man. Hers is the privilege to see and to know God ere his truths come to others, especially such as you."

"It don't strike me that way, my dear."

"Yes it does. Perhaps but dimly. I have the sense of the fallen, you have not."

"Why not?" he asked unthinkingly.

"Yes, why not? That I do not understand. But I have gone to the depths of hell,—"

"And scraped up a sandbar in my neighborhood, is that your remark?"

"Yes, if you wish it so."

"Not at all. I am up to my ears in hell, to be sure, but not the one you have in mind."

"Let us hope, Tanton, that there is no other one. Tanton, my son's fate wears at my heart. As the loss of a child gives the sense of a void, the birth of one gives the sense of gain. I am more than I was when it was but I. You choose to throw away a true heart and a love born of still and thoughtful sense. It is refined as that which has the second time passed through the fire and left its dross,—can you feel that this heart is lost forever to the world of pleasure and of joy, that you lay upon it the chill of frost and death? The substance of life cloys up and you tear rudely away the mask. Is it a phantom child? Tanton, some may have loved you longer and some with more elegant pretense have told you that they loved you,—yet why will I repeat over and over again this useless tale? You have left your mark on my brow and changed forever the course of human action, but I'll not chide you

for myself, it is not only a question of righting wrong,—you will long and sigh for a love as true as mine someday. It will come to you in your darker hours when the world lies in its shroud and the pride of your pulses has departed from you, in your weakness you will wish for me, Tanton Torquay, and reproach yourself that you was not kind and honorable to me, then it may be too late."

Tanton was not callous enough to sit unmoved to this pathetic appeal in its simplicity of yearning and his voice was gentler when he answered her.

"My dear Eloine, how you distress me. I shall not have remorse because I will have righted your plea ere then. I was foolishly carried away with the seductive charms of Doleah Antieth, her high standing attracted me, I am somewhat a poor creature of interest, but I saw my error and I said,—no, Tanton, you must not forget Eloine,—all that is now past, she crossed the Rubicon and there are just as good fish on this side of that river as there are on the other side."

"Are they all fish to you?" she asked.

"Yes and good for a Friday's dinner. We need not quarrel about it, it is all past. She belongs to mythology and you and me to current events. Come to see me at the Mansion, while the distinguished crank travels in the land of aristocracy as befits one of his wealth. If I had his money, you would not regret it."

"Yes?"

"Yes, come to me there. Come when it is dark. I will show you a rear entrance that I have discovered."

"An honest invitation!"

"No,—not that. There are servants there whose tongues wag like cow's tails in fly time and we must not provoke scandal."

"You wish me for your baseness, nothing else,—nothing else."

"Well,—in the meantime, yes. When we are better off we will transmute that baseness into gold. Ha, my dearest Eloine you shall yet be mistress of Thousand Stair. Have patience. We have played well and in time we shall make our quitclaim good."

"Tanton, if one could ever believe in you, what beautiful words you use and how one must hear them in the sadness of knowing that they are not true. You have of late been so harsh and to my pleadings so dumb and so wringing of my heart,—for God's sake Tanton, if not for me, endure me for my son. Even though I must go away from you on the hour of marriage, my son will be an honest man someday."

"Yes, yes, don't worry so much. How you women will worry about little things. There's no hurry, neither of us is to die to-night, I tell you yes, I will do all that you ask of me. But I am struggling along and much as I wish to, I dare not think of love's sweet idleness. I am ears up in trade, a thousand cares are at my door,—some fairer, easier day, I'll turn to you and love you as I know I ought."

"You have no time for sweethearts now? That is how you sternly set aside the semblance of your loving? A worthless toy has tired you in your play,—I was an image for your yesterday. I might with patience wait but the shame your thoughtless person caused will

not hide away. I can keep the boy at school and no one knows that he is mine, but the yearning of a mother's heart to the child that sleeps in the untender hand of the stranger, is beyond your comprehension. I cannot give a blasted heart and a defiled person to another, I cannot deceive anyone and go with secret shame into marriage, you realize that? I am for you only or else a lonely life of lifelong shame, you realize that?"

"Yes my dear, I know, I know, my dear, be not so anxious, I mean it well and on some proper day I'll right your wrongs. Think of me kindly and as one that is to be your future partner in the joys of matrimony. Leave me now,—my cares are truly burdensome,—have patience, my darling Eloine,—have patience.

"Can I believe you? And will it be soon? How sweetly I'd wear for you the charms of wife and fill your home with heaven. Can I ever learn to trust you, Tanton Torquay?"

"My dear, you can trust me," and Tanton put stress on the last word as though he meant it from the depths of his soul and then he turned away with a soft good-night and walked up the steep path towards his home.

"Confound it all! I'm in trouble, sure enough!" And Tanton put his vehemence into those words as though he meant what he said. He was perplexed between manifest duty and unconquerable desire for revenge.

CHAPTER XII.

TANTON AND GERAND DISCUSS SUNDRY THEORIES WITH
SOME CALLOUSNESS AND FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF
CYNICS.

Tanton sat in the Mansion of a Thousand Stairs and congratulated himself that he would be able, in due time, to get rid of Eloine. He did not know how, but there would be a way. He reproached himself too that he had wronged her and felt that he ought to do something for her. If he were in position to give her ten thousand dollars he would do so.

Despite his inordinate egotism, there were dim moments in which he half realized that his brain was not of the very first order. He was bright, but there was a certain childishness and immaturity of judgment that would show its weakness at odd moments, thereby to inform him that noble intellect and sovereign manhood was not his portion. On the other hand, he thought so well of himself that when finally common sense inclined him to change his opinion, his mind had become so settled in its favorableness towards itself, that it was impossible to change it. So he bid fair to strut on to the end of his days in the religion of conceitendom in the land of vanitania.

Gerand was announced. Tanton awoke from his

self examination and was glad that some one had come to relieve him of his burden.

“Good evening, old boy, come in,” was his comprehensive greeting and Gerand made himself at home. Wine flowed and smoke curled in ringlets, congeniality and careless good humor filled the room. There was some sort of stirphood between them,—if not that of consanguinity, at least of similar talent in several directions.

“I hear that our good friend travels,” said Gerand, after a while.

“Yes, his disease has carried him off. Let him go,—the farther the better and the longer the journey and the more breakdowns, the better I shall like it.”

“You called it a disease?”

“Yes, that is what we call Hemi-epilepsia procursiva, the sensory half of the brain becomes bamboozled and it affects the motor half a little and then the subject gets a move on. He was a strange fellow, but I diagnosed his case from the beginning, he was often hyperconscious and used to fix his eye on the jackpot until he could see forms, colors and lights and usually most of my ready change. He was a genius.”

“You refer to him as one that was?”

“Yes, he ‘was’ so far as we are concerned. This suits you, don’t it, Gerand? Would you like to hold on here for a while?”

“Yes, to be sure. Free beds for weary sleepers,—and not oyster beds either. You say that Ondell used to play you out at the game, eh?”

“Why consarn it, yes, he could see a dollar through

the thickest kind of jeans,—however, Gerand, if you play a good hand,—we,—you and me,—us and company, can own this place and handle the money.”

“You can depend on me. I know good things when I see them. I tell you the ancient knights, whose deeds of chivalry challenge admiration, had their good points, to be sure, but the modern knight who builds himself a fine house or whips somebody else out of one, is entitled to some consideration.”

Tanton laughed at the remark. It struck him as being a point well taken.

“In the meantime, let us drink and be merry. He will not return for months, perhaps not in years. We ought to manage it while we are here. We do not need all these servants, we can attend to the place and keep their salaries. That is one item. We will tell Sir Ondell that we had to discharge them. We can learn where he keeps his golden apron and eventually we shall manage it.”

“Delightful. We will get on somehow.”

“I think that the first thing I shall do, will be to write a book, I have had enough experiences to justify me in setting some of them down. In this house some thirty years ago was born to everlasting fame, one Ondell Urmoden, that would be a good opening for one of the chapters,” said Tanton laughing, as he changed seats, “he was a peculiar fellow, grand, gloomy and peculiar, I believe is the way they put it these days, but for a fact, he was a grand, gloomy and peculiar fellow, his personality was signified by a wild and desperate fancy and a riot of the imagination. His story

is the most picturesque ever told and at last he became so tangled in a profound analysis, that he gathered himself together and left for parts unknown, leaving his friends in charge of his estate and filled with an all pervading sense of insignificance.” Tanton laughed heartily and Gerand joined him.

“I’m afraid that writing a story is too much work for you,—that is, in addition to all your other troubles,” said Gerand.

“But men have died a dozen times for less than the glory of telling a good story,—his case ought to bring me fame,—I think I’ll try it.”

“Speaking of other matters, I hear that Dolee has settled down with Sondalere,—I suppose that had a good deal to do with Ondell’s sudden determination to see the world?”

“Yes, I suppose so,” replied Tanton carelessly, “she saved herself from being a sacrifice to the social evil anyway.”

“I wouldn’t say that, Tanton, she’s a decent girl,” replied Gerand.

“Yes,—oh yes, decent enough to throw herself at Sondalere.”

“I think she is a thoroughly respectable girl,” persisted Gerand.

“Yes,—oh yes, of course. I don’t say no. She had ways that I did not like, she had a habit of giving my bad points to my partner and when she met me, of giving my partner’s bad points to me and when she met a mutual friend, she’d give him both our bad points,—that is why I did not like her.”

"A small matter. You had a quarrel with her once I suppose and never could forgive her afterwards, some people are that way."

"Have it your own way. It is certain that she is past our redemption now, but all the same, I wish I had her and I'll get her some day too."

"Stale then."

"No matter. Revenge is the thing. Gerand, damn you, I'll be frank with you,—I loved that woman, I did not mean to say anything derogative to her character in my joking a moment ago, my heart used to follow her around all over the country and I never knew what to do with myself when I saw her. I longed to possess her and I know that she would have been happy with me, I will have her yet,—by the gods,—I believe it is my fate."

"Oh pshaw! You cannot love her now. It is on the principle that no man can love truly a woman that another man has. Why, a father cannot love his daughter as much after her marriage as he did before. Man loves woman when there is no other man around. He must be the sole proprietor. The father and the father-in-law are under restraint in the houses of the married children, they may not order there, they are not the head of the house, not the first chicken in the brood. Man thirsts for the companionship of woman and for the old time proprietorship of one of them, so he marries again, most likely a young one and people idiotically wonder why the old man did not live with his daughter where he had a good home and all the creature comforts. You'd be in the same fix, fooling

with Madam Sondalere. All of her that is worth having has passed into the possession of another and you could never be first in her heart or first in anything. You'd be the old man in the house."

"By thunder, you are a premier logician! I'll have your name fired through the Academy!" Tanton laughed in his dry, melancholy fashion.

"Life is too short to give way to all these fine emotions, we exist too doubtfully to hinge on hairsprung arguments,—I've a desire for her and before I am a thousand years older, we shall see what we shall see."

"Strictly honorable?"

"Yes sir! Straight business! I want her for my everyday partner,—for life,—for better or worse and I think, that is, I have dim suspicion, that I'd kill the carrion that puts his vile hand upon her. Do you know" he continued after a pause, "that I sometimes have a vague notion that Sondalere used arts on that girl and that he took her partly against her will. If I knew it for sure, nothing on earth could save him. I'd do him on sight."

"Oh tush man, you must be calm, resolute and deliberate, you'll spread yourself for a hanging and nothing gained by it."

"Yes, yes. I'm often sorry that I have such evil propensities. I'm sorry that I did not marry Eloine years ago and let it go at that."

"Yes, that is another one of your vagaries. You regret now that you did not marry her and you never realized how much she loved you and all that, but the fact is that what you would marry now, you would not

have married then. Your mind and ideal has changed. You would not marry her now if you were the same man that you were five years ago. That is a sentimental rot that we get as we grow older. If you had the alternative of marrying Eloine now or of jumping into the Bourbese with a tombstone in your sock, you'd take the latter."

"My dear Gerand!"

"Yes sir!"

"You're a fool!"

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"Why don't you get this lamb for your own?"

"I'm not foolish to that extent, my dear Tanton."

"Fudge, you are but human."

"And you freely donate her to me?"

"Assuredly, God bless you both."

"No, I thank you. I'm not anxious for your blessing."

"Or God's either?"

"Nor God's either."

"You are always right, Gerand. She's hung to me for good."

"Then unhang her."

"Yes, confound it! Unhang her, that's the question!"

Gerand laughed immoderately at this and Tanton seemed not in the least pleased with his thoughts. He filled the glasses and passed one to his friend.

"Drink,—here's to the lady that loves us best!"

"Here's to the lady that loves us most!" repeated Gerand and Tanton continued the subject after his

own fashion, "here's to the maiden in full blast, she of the dark brown hair, her eyes are dark, her skin is fair, she is too sweet to last. She knew me in my glory time, when purse was long and fat, and life was such a peaceful rhyme, that the devil knew where I was at!"

"Together may you eat the short horn beef in the days of the future. You'll meet her again Tanton."

"Yes, like the devil. That reminds me. When I was younger I wrote a poem that subsequently seemed to fit my case exactly: 'In the confidential archives down in hell, there is registered a doctor, mark it well, who thrived in all his glory but at last was jammed, and beached upon the rock shores of the damned,—tell it not in Gascony.'

"Good! Any more of it?" asked Gerand

"Yes, another verse: Down in that boundless brimstone territory, his claim was staked and marked preparatory, amid the forests full of naked fossil trees, where fusil oil composed the angry seas,—his eminent domain.' "

"Excellent! Beats Tennifellow all hollow! Any more of it?"

"Yes, after I wash down the ashes. The other verse: 'When life was done he landed much against his will, and saw the blue smoke curling o'er the distant hill, he climbed the mount, what was beyond he could not tell, but when he got there, it was hell,—and no mistake either!'"

Gerand was drunk enough to believe that the recita-

tion was that of naked genius and Tanton, had he not been drinking, would not have repeated the verses, because he hated poetry. He believed that everything could be expressed so much better in ordinary words, than in musical terms, that he would not versify his thoughts, but when he grew eloquent, he unconsciously made music with his voice. He was in many degrees a natural singer, in the same way that most of nature's singers are devoid of conscience and morality. He had every attribute of nature's sweetest gifts with the deficiencies that usually go with them.

"I ought not scoff as I do," he said after a while, "it is not right for me to berate myself or the things that have come around me. I suppose that God and his image, the genus homo, have made many mistakes and need experiences. God repented of his first experiment and possibly of the last. When man wished to find out about his nakedness, he became unclean. Then he drowned them all out. Let us believe that God has pleasure in his experiments and experiences, that he builds worlds and creates people as curious experiments, like the boy who builds his mudhouse. Let us believe that he repented him of the huge men and animals and concluded that a smaller edition would be handier. Nature, which is God, is an infinite delight of experiments and evolutions which must be of great interest to their creator. If God or Tanton knew all the results of a thing done by them, they would have no interest in anything. Heaven would be boredom."

"What in thunder are you talking of?" said Gerand,

as if half waking up, "Sondalere gave me a Sunday school lecture just before he went off to do his deviltry and you are giving me a dish of theosophy,—what are you up to?"

"Nothing at all. I was just rambling along trying to find out something about myself. We are too serious,—too serious. We get religious and let the good things slip by us. Consarn it, Gerand, it is a delicately balanced world, by long ages of combining of elements, we have struck the habitable human creative pace. It has all been accidental. Some day, the newly isolated negathum or negathim, whatever it is, will become, suddenly, too fond of the oxygen or the nitrogen and then explode the whole hippodrome. Possibly the air will be full of orange yellow gases and nowhere will we find it breathable. Then we exit, friend Gerand and another human animal, that can stand the new conditions, will take our place. And though accidental and wholly a product of environment, there will arise prophets amongst them, to tell of mystic and divine origin and of the great purpose of all things. They will herald an imaginary God and set up a standard of morality and of possession and of dispossession and tell me, for instance, that I have no right to Dolee because, by a few words constituting a crazy ceremony, she is supposed to belong to another fellow. Damn it, I'd see myself,—" he said vehemently, "hello, hello, Gerand, change cars!" He

NOTE.—Negathim or Negathum, terms denotive of undiscovered elements.

laughed, for Gerand was fast asleep with his head on the table.

“He missed something profound that time,” said Tanton as he filled his pipe and resumed his extraordinary meditations.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER A YEAR, THREE PHILOSOPHERS DRINK ONE ANOTHER'S HEALTH WITH SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES.

A year had elapsed. During that year Tanton's skill as a diplomat amatorian had been put severely to the test in evading and cajoling the trustful Eloine, but circumstances and adroitness had thrown their bounties upon him. The scene of this day was again the annual barbecue and this time the wily Tanton had fathered the bulk of the expenses. Each year some prosperous man volunteered to head the list to buy the beef and provide the music and Tanton must have prospered somewhat in this year and besides he had another motive in winning the good will of his neighbors, he was up to some deviltry and must pave the way for it benevolently.

The annual barbecue was this year held in a more picturesque place than that of the preceeding years, at no other place than at the foot of the hill in the small forest-like park below the frowning mansion of a Thousand Stairs,—a place well fitted for the festival. An arborium stood in that park and it was covered over with a massive wild grape vine that secluded it as though it were a house. All around it grew a dense undergrowth of vines and immediately beyond it, all this had been cleared away so that nothing remained

other than beautiful oaks and hickories thinly shrouding the grassy earth. It was such a place as Ondell loved and he had seen to it in his day that it was well kept. Nor was it worse kept by Tanton, for he too, loved the quiet nook and often there, his feverish soul was wont to linger, listening to the susurous rustling of the leaves.

This day Tanton and Sondalere sat in the arborium and drank merrily and the former, in consonance with his characteristics, was alternately stinging his companion with keen wit or lulling him to great ease with his philosophic inquisitions. He was at this moment telling the credulous Sondalere of one of his mystical experiences at the Mansion, in response to the latter's question,—though, in fact, it was a falsehood done artistically.

“I saw a thin veil come over me” he was saying, “one day as I fell into that gentle somnolism that will come upon one who sits in the chair of the lamented Ondell and behold I seemed to wander on the border line and was seized with an awful rush, where it seemed that worlds met together and I was swirled in a jiffy to another one. Should it ever come to you, friend Sondalere, to meet with a similar experience, you will find that what I say is true, for in the temple of the third heaven, a tablet was placed by me, telling of my visit and that, in anticipation of an immediate swirl back to annihilation, I thought it well to leave a memento there. But here I am and when I return to that resplendent domain it will be in the spirit and not in the body.” He laughed.

"A fine example of a crank lecture on spiritism,—I declare, you seem to be in earnest about it," said Sondalere.

"Earnest? Why blame it, I never was more earnest in my life."

"Go to. But I admit that it is a great gift to be able to seize upon a spiritual truth and tear the husk from it."

"You mean that it is a fine gift to be able to seize upon a great type of the universal rogue and pull the skin off of him, eh?"

"Nothing personal?"

"No. Merely an exudation of that philosophic calm which is the crowning characteristic of the mind of the scientist."

"Fudge."

"Well then, fudge. What else? Come tell us of your marital experiences, if you will not philosophize. Your judgment ought to be excellent after the honeymoon."

"Yes,—but hardly a subject that propriety asks to have discussed."

"Why not?—Old friends,—why I am as much interested in that as ever. I may want to marry some day myself and need instruction. I hope sincerely that you are happy. You ought to have full bliss with such a lovely wife as Dolee,—in despite your worn and haggard look."

"My looks are haggard?"

"I've noticed it,—yes. And says I to myself, there are two kinds of collapse, one is to swell up and burst

and the other is to dry up and crack. Pray suffer not either to happen to you."

"Well I declare! However, as you desire a glimpse of the *mise en scène* of my marriage, forsooth, I have a wifely maid, one with kindness in her heart and one in whose dreams I hear strange mumblings that seem to mar the peace of wedded quietude."

"Indeed? That is too sad. Marriage at this phasis, I should surmise, needs a deal of something else. You are not unhappy with her are you?"

"Well, confidentially, I am not unhappy, but yet I am not happy."

"Possibly your forces are not strong enough?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh those arts of yours. Well, nothing of it,—it interests me scientifically."

"Yes? I shall tell you no more then."

"Oh, come to. You ought to know me well enough not to mind my silly jokes. Really, are you not getting on so well?"

"Well now, it is this way. Dolee says that she loves me but she has never a kind word or a kiss for me. She never suggests a walk, though she walks out with others. She is willing to keep house and that's the trouble, she keeps it closely when I am around. She never has a moment to spare for anything but pots and pans. I long always for something other than the word, I want the deed. I rescued her from indifference and got it myself."

"Oh, my poor Sondalere," said Tanton apparently as sincere as a sorrowing friend could be, "I think that

the *summum bonum* of marriage must be other than that."

"Possibly she yet remembers Ondell Urmoden."

"Possibly it might be Tanton Torquay?" and he laughed heartily at the disconcerted Sondalere, who did not at all relish the thrust.

Tanton felt at once that Sondalere was in sore mis-
ease but he was glad of it. He deliberately intended
to goad him to the point of exasperation, if possible.
He burned with quenchless hate and Sondalere was
the present focus of his evil thoughts. He longed
for an opportunity of putting a heavy hand upon him,
but hitherto fortune had not favored him.

As he sat there and played with his victim, his thoughts were desperate and terrible. An incarnation demoniac seemed to live in him. He breathed the atmosphere of destruction and annihilation. Too many things lived and bred on the air that sustained him,—it must not be. Some of them must not breathe with him. Swiftly through his keen brain rushed a thousand thoughts. "I am far from chemists and from the scientific search for death's faint causes. How little a philter brewed of the *Nox*, might give this cur his *somnus*! What a fine place and a convenient time to give the *coup de grace* with a clement skill!"

Yet he must play awhile and nerve himself up to the sticking point and drink more wine and his victim must drink yet more wine, that stupor might come upon him. Tanton Torquay was a fine grained, skilful, artistic and merciful criminal, his destructiveness was

of the inseaching, melting kind, not the violently tearing out and desperately smashing. His talk indicated that he was quick and desperate and that passed for braggadocio and counted for nothing serious. His thoughts were always the reverse of his words and if his actions bespoke of hasty temper, his real purpose was so slow and calculating and so long to the end that others had forgotten his threats and never suspected him. He could not help it, of course not,—the serpent was born in him and for whatever purpose in the plan of a possible infinite succession of lives, passing down through the circle of lives, from the genesis to the nirvana, from step to step of suffering's developments,—he had his destiny to fulfill and his story is simply his story, for it cannot tell of the mainspring of the motive far back,—perhaps ingrained and inbred in a thousand years,—he hated,—hated his brother and sister, he must not be crossed, he was a survival of the tiger in the soul that had not been released from it by the soul's infinite evolution.

“Go on, you interest me, Sondalere, my dear friend, I never suspected that marriage was so deucedly romantic. So you have lover's longings after the event as well as before? Who'd a thought it!”

“You are rudely jesting with a sacred subject. I was telling you confidences, like a fool that I am, up to my ears in wine and you are making sport of me.”

“Not at all! I declare Sondalere, you are half a child at times. I am sorry for you, sorry that she does not love you, sorry,—”

“Who the hell said that she did not love me? I said

that she was indifferent, that is what I said, but that does not mean that she has no use for me. She loves me more than any man but,—but, you see,—this is how it is,—she is like all women when the knot is tied, she thinks that settled it all and the rest is understood. She has her mind on her confounded pots and pans all the time and I don't want to appear so childish as to call her attention to the fact that I am lonely and what not, I say damn the pans and the pots, but I get off to myself and say it so that she cannot hear me."

"Yes, I see it all now. You want her to love you without being reminded of the fact that she ought to. In fact, she ought to know enough to make much of you and pull your cheek and kiss your dimple and run her dainty fingers through your hair, without being told to do so. Is that it?"

"I think that is about it."

"That is what we are married for,—to have the use of each other, said a friend of mine describing a similar case and you are out at the matrimonial elbow. The fact is that you made a mistake, you thought that you were doing a smart trick when you abducted this charming lady into slavery,—that is about the whole of it."

"You are positively insulting, I will talk no more with you on this subject. Instead of being a counsellor and a friend you are stabbing me in a tender place. I have not forgotten our interview of a year ago. You swore to your revenge then."

"My dear Sondalere, how you wrong me. I know that you are nobody and nothing and that you have

played false to every friend, but for all that I like you and I am willing to let the past be past. I did not mean to insult you, but of course, if you are determined to be insulted, I cannot say that you are right, but I do not care,—not a whit!"

"No, you care not. You have a habit of not caring. It is not in you to care for anything, I know that. You are as base a man as I ever met, that is all there is of that."

"Wine is talking now, friend Sondalere, nothing but the glory of the supernaculum,—the devil with it all! Drink it to the dregs and the last drop upon the thumb,—to-day is our annual barbecue, friend Sondalere."

"You have no right to insult me as you have. I insist that you owe me an apology."

"Yes,—a foot long. I merely said that I did not understand by what miserable trickery you won a truant bride. She loved me, and as for you, had I dreamt of you,—I tell you as your friend,—had I known that you were to stand in my light, I'd surely have been early desperate. But when I saw that the game went against me, I resigned in sorrow. I suppose, that, like many other girls, she went love-wild for any old thing and then any worthless cur sufficed."

"Do I understand you to say that I am a cur?" asked Sondalere unsteadily.

"Why, dear no,—not you. Of course, not you. Speaking generally, let's have another drink for a better understanding. They say that the tempter is really

the true friend of humanity. I would try your mettle,—friend Sondalere, that is all."

"You have tried me too roughly to-day."

"Oh, well, —" Tanton as he filled the glass, looked up and through the open branches of the great vine, saw one coming to the arborium. So unexpected was the sight that he forgot to continue his banter,—instantly the scene changed, for it was none other than Ondell Urmoden.

He leisurely came to the arborium and looked in. Tanton had gotten up and went to meet him with outstretched hand and ready smile. He was not easily surprised, but this unexpected turn-up had, only for a moment, completely upset him. He was caught in the moment of a deadly act, as it were, but by the time he had shaken hands with Ondell his old feeling of assurance had returned to him.

"How have you fared,—you are looking well,—your trip has benefited you,—when did you return? Just now? Indeed, quite a pleasant surprise," and Tanton was courtliness itself.

Ondell had returned the effusive greeting in a matter of fact way; he was not given to over-civility at any time. Walking up to the table where Sondalere sat with his head on his elbows, half a dozing, he laid his hand upon his shoulder, not knowing who it was. Sondalere roused himself and turned up his head. Instantly his face blanched and a coward and a craven sat there.

"You seem well at your ease," said Ondell, and then he paused and waited a long time as if debating

whether or not to provoke quarrel, or to let the past be buried in forgetfulness. "You are a traitor, I believe."

Sondalere regained some of his normal composure and looked at Ondell unsteadily, for the wine bore him down.

"Perhaps. I was simply the better man; she wanted me and me she's got. I think you ought to know enough to let such things alone."

Ondell had not expected such a retort; he did not know that the wine had nerved the docile Sondalere. Tanton sat at the table, and upon the instant comprehended that there would be an encounter between the men.

"This will be the moment in which to give mine enemy a trial by tanghin,—if he vomit it, he is innocent; if not, then forsooth some one is guilty,—ah, glorious sunket that my friend, the sailor, brought far from the shores of Africa and for his pains shall meet in hell with Jimmy Squarefeet,—now I may use you and no man in these parts can analyze the poison,—" Tanton's thoughts rushed upon him in a torrent, and, unable to resist the impulse, he cast a dainty powder into the glass of Sondalere.

Ondell had, at the words of Sondalere, fixed his gaze intently upon him and for moments seemed to hesitate. The tiger had roused within him, he was a powerful man, the year had brought him vast exertions of a physical nature, he had tramped the world relent-

NOTE.—Jimmy Squarefeet, a sailor's devil.

lessly and his sinews were hard with exposure,—then he struck at Sondalere and the latter fell.

But he got himself up quickly and, as if partly aroused from his intoxication, and once into the fight, he stood on the defensive.

“Here, friends, a fair fight. And before,—drink with me a sip of wine to the exaltation of your courage.” Tanton handed the glass of Sondalere to Ondell. Then he seemed to realize his mistake. Then he thought that it mattered not, it was better so. He had not thought of this, but one was as much in the way as the other.

“I’ll drink with you,” said Sondalere, “and then, Sir Ondell, you and me are to settle this squarely.”

“As you will,” replied the latter.

Sondalere reached over the glasses and took hold of that of Ondell as if to be as offensive as possible. Tanton dared not say anything,—anything that he did would be suspicious. Then only and not before this moment, did he realize the enormity of his act. He struggled with himself and thought to strike down the fatal cup, but something restrained him. It was almost as if the fear of the thing had brought on paralysis. Before it would be too late,—ah, it was too late,—Sondalere drank and then set the glass down.

Tanton grasped it and crushed it under his foot, and Ondell turned towards him in surprise, but the next instant something surprised him more than that.

“What? Not drinking with me?” exclaimed Sondalere, and, seizing the remaining glass of wine, he dashed it into Ondell’s face.

The latter sprang at him with all his long pent fury and with perhaps a mind bleached with many mysterious essences, and for a moment the struggle between the men was terrific.

Slowly then Sondalere sank down with the blood gushing from his nose and Ondell stood back, his first paroxysm of rage somewhat subsided.

Sondalere said something and Tanton bent over him.

"There is a heavy black mist before me. I cannot see things. I fear the world because I cannot see. I dream only of voices. What is it? Oh,—what is it?"

His body became limp and deathlike.

"It is but a fainting," said Ondell.

"No, it is more than a swoon," answered Tanton with a voice of melancholy, "the man is dying."

"What?" asked the terrified Ondell.

"As I said. Soon this is rigor mortis. To-morrow perhaps, a funeral. Fly before the people come. You have killed him."

"Oh, God, no! I have not done this thing!"

"My dear friend, these reliquæ speak their own tale. Go,—I will care for your property as I have done. Send me a cipher, that I may communicate with you. Go,—go! The ends of earth!"

"No. I go nowhere. Life has not of late pleased me. This is the place to end the tragedy."

"Do not think of it. Self-murder is not the thing. Come,—I will be your friend. I will say that it was a fight, that he was the aggressor. You stand for involuntary manslaughter,—the penalty will be light.

There will come other days and brighter hours.
Come, be rational."

"Tanton! Tanton! for the love of God, stand by me and I will give you half of my possessions."

"Very well, we will see to all that at a more convenient time. Ho there, somebody! Come here!"

A very surprised people rushed into the arborium and Tanton told them what had happened. "Let us remove the body to the home and you may also take charge of the prisoner who voluntarily remains here and who knows he must comply with the formalities of law. Be easy with him, he is a gentleman."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNPLEASANT INTERVIEW BETWEEN TORQUAY AND
ELOINE IN WHICH PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL
POISONS ARE DISCUSSED.

It was the day after the barbecue. Tanton was a sadder man; something had come into his life that stole the greenth from the leaves and the music from the babbling brook. He had so steeled himself in a concentration of his own cynical philosophies that he believed that such a thing as reproach could no longer affect him. But it seemed otherwise. He reproached himself unconsciously. Whenever he thought of anything, the next moment his thoughts wandered back to the scene in the arborium. There was after all such a thing as conscience.

As he rode along this morning in that vague unrest and suppressed fear, he was indeed unhappier than he had ever been in his life, and often he had been very unhappy,—intensely melancholy and in utter gloom. All that was not a consequence to the dejection he now experienced. His dismalness was not in the least relieved by seeing at this moment Eloine Terren. She rode as if to meet him. There was no way to avoid her, much as he wished that he could.

“Good morning, Tanton Torquay,” she said coldly,

and her manner was so distant that it at once arrested his attention. He had been accustomed to effusive and tender greetings from her and he expected the same this morning, but he got so chilly a look that he thought to himself that even she must wish to desert him.

To one of his nature, much as he wished at all other times that she might find it convenient to leave him alone, this was a disagreeable surprise this morning.

"What is the matter with you, Eloine?" They had stopped by the roadside and their horses nipped the grass and pulled the reins down to their ears. Eloine reached for hers, but it was too far down and Tanton dismounted to hand it to her.

"How could you do that?" she asked with a tone of sad reproach.

"I don't understand you."

"Tanton, before God!"

"Well?" Tanton's face blanched, and he knew it.

"Tanton! oh, God! how could you do it?" She wrung her hands in anguish.

"Do what?" he asked as completely unnerved as it was possible for him to be. All the fear and gloom of this morning and of the restless night seemed to have concentrated upon him.

"I stood back of the arborium, Tanton, and I saw you put something into the glass of Sondalere. Oh, the horror of it!"

"I?" he asked weakly, but now that there was a witness and he faced the desperate crisis, his courage began quickly to gather in the instinct of self-preser-

vation. "I did that? Girl, you mistake. I did nothing of the kind."

"Yes, you did something of that kind. And as a result the man is dead."

"Ondell killed him. He struck him so savagely that he ruptured a blood vessel in the brain. You are wrongly accusing me. I'd kill you for that," he said, with his bravado returning.

"No doubt," she answered defiantly. "I am surprised that you have not long since given me a quietus, since you are so adept at it. I tremble when I think of all that I have passed through with you."

"Oh, for love of goodness, stop teasing me, Eloine."

"No. You have taken my honor and you can take my life if you wish. Both have been thrown away on you, and what is left of either is at your disposal. Nonetheless I saw the dastardly deed; discreetly I stood back and smoldered down the strong impulse to shriek aloud at such a crime. Would you have the witness? Here is a secluded place where I may die, and you may hide me until the day of judgment and no one will then know of it but God and Tanton. And of the two, it will be safest with God. I am ready for the sacrifice,—are you?"

Tanton startled at these words, colder and more desperate were they than any resolution that had ever bound his stubborn mind; the intenseness of courage of this woman was something that impressed him as marvelous. He was silent, carefully resting his nerves until they became more normal. At length he

said slowly, with a return to his former and usual habit of blasphemous speech:

“Eloine, my dear, you need not leave me to God, a great many of my friends do not settle their bills there, they want an earthly accounting. See here, I have had a desperate struggle with fortune and just as I see daylight coming, you seek to destroy all my prospects.”

“Tanton, the light you see is the reflection of hell.”

“No matter, then. I have always been the under dog. I got nothing as good as I ought to have had it, but as good as I could get. I would rather be a leading dog than a dead lion. I have struggled for you in this.”

“I would not share it with you! Base as I am, I am too noble for that!”

“Dang it, woman! You are perverse like all women. What matters it, one more or less, so long as we can be great and rich. Let the dead alone. Let Ondell go to prison. I get half his belongings to send him there.”

“And the hour of vengeance?”

“Yours has come,—if you wish it.”

“No,—not mine. I could not disgrace the father of my son. I am chained to perdition with you in the blood that I have borne. You have damned us and it grieves me to know that the sins of the father shall be visited on the son,—and the mother? God help her!”

“Why will you talk of this? Let it be alone. I am as I am. I have a standard of my own. I look at life

differently than you do. One lion has but killed the other in the battle for supremacy. I am as the beast of the field,—Eloine, I am as the beast of the wild woods."

"Yes, Tanton,—as the beast of the field."

"Not so, either. I am more than the beast of the field, for I love you with enduring love, and would some day make you happy. You offered me but a moment ago your life. I wish it even as it is offered, but in another sense. You must combine your interests with mine,—a thing that you have never done,—on the contrary, you have instead gotten in my way; reverse your methods, together we can fight the battle; apart, we are as children crying in the wilderness. Come, come, Eloine, brace yourself for the final issue of this thing. Since you have seen it all, you have seen the fight, the desperate encounter, the maddened fury of the aggressor, dwell on that at the trial and leave me to remember but faintly what did happen. Do you understand?"

"And what of the man with swollen throat and staring eyes, of open mouth and pinched, cold and stark feature; he whose fingers are fixed in a last convulsion, he looks at you and is but an image and a transient marble that the winds shall smother into dust, but to you he must ever be an accuser. His earth shall fade and your mind is written with that earth in all its depths forever."

"Oh, hush, for God's sake! You'd make the strong man weak. I did but surprise him while he slept on the wine-washed banks. I kissed him on the brow and

he was no more. I served the hand of fate,—unconsciously,—unwillingly,—but fate had selected me for its executioner and for a reason that I know not."

"One would suppose from your words that painful knowledge had come to you out of unconscious bliss,—Oh, Tanton, I cannot forget this awful picture. How could you do this? Has your manhood rotted out of you? Will you crawl down to the beast?"

"Let it be, my dearest Eloine. It is crime, and crime touched with the drip of sweetest romance. For love of others, I have staked my life."

"Have you, indeed?"

"Life is what we make it. You remember our last promise? I will make it good. You will not testify against the man who seeks you for a wife. You will love me too much. We have common interests, as you said."

"And why not now? It is not far to the county line,—if indeed you are so honest as you wish me to believe you."

"Only, that it would seem suspicious to marry now. The trial must be ended and some time elapse. People might suspect collusion. Ondell committed this murder. I gave him a sleeping powder seeing that he was violent. It may be that his heart was weak. It may be that at his vitals gnawed a lingering sore that brought him to the very edge where but a push was needed to throw him off the cliff. He died too easily, something ailed him. But enough of this. Ondell holds that which is essential to us. That we can get from him. I will have his written paper before

night, as I ride now to make my reports and will see him at the jail, I will show it to you; wait for me to-morrow at the mansion. I will return by four o'clock; have ready the coffee and my room.

"Tanton, I dare not again believe in you!"

"My dear, you've got me where you've got to believe in me. I cannot get out of it, even had I a wish to do so. You will hold the whip over me and you will have means to persuade me." Tanton actually forced a smile.

"Well," she said resignedly, "you must escape unwhipped from this it seems. You are born to luck. I am at the point where the soul is sold. My love had once so overcome my pride that all I had on earth I gave for love. I have not retained one hairbreadth of shame. I have not left me enough of that sublime moral courage that I would not give another's life to gain the end of my own affections. I am truly cursed for the sins that you have brought upon me. I see no other way than to follow you down,—down into the depths of hell. There is nothing for me left, but Tanton soiled and Tanton steeped in crime,—I am his slave,—one of the victims of his crime that am held in abject subjection."

"Do not say that."

"I might throw it off? I might be noble! I need not compound a felony! No, I need not do it. But my heart was bad enough to fall under you at first, it is too weak to resist you at last. I might be honest! But I am not. I might have been an honest wife, a virtuous mother, and have dwelt in a paradise on

earth, but I was too weak to hold my virtue against the storm and being weak,—I am weak, and I must grovel with you and crawl down to the beast, and swear falsely and perjure myself that I may not now be greater than I was when first I met you. And in your time you might bid me go out and kill for you, and, being weak, I must yield. Tanton, I have suffered. God knows how bitterly I have suffered."

"Oh, my! Do not rave so about it. What's done is done. I have fulfilled the stings of youth and carried out the laws of my predestiny. I am as a wind-tossed wreck that flies on the wandering wave, only that."

"Very well," said Eloine sadly.

"I must go. The way is long and gloomy. It is thirty miles to the court-house. Good bye, good bye, sweetheart, you will not falter? You will not desert me? I shall be so uneasy until I see you again. You will not let your tongue slip in this matter, Eloine?" His voice had assumed that insinuating and melting quality that it usually had. It was the gift of eloquence, the soft drip of the sweet word, the magnetism whose unconscious art is greater than any power on earth.

"No, I will not make any mistake, Tanton, I will be careful. You need not be anxious about me."

Tanton rode on and after a while his feelings became desperate. The lonely woods heightened the sense of loneliness. A certain capacity for perceiving the sublime was his, now it proved a burden, for it furrowed his mind with intense imagination.

"To hell with these fears," he exclaimed at length

impatiently. "Our business on earth, said a wiser man than me, is to enact hell. The villain always holds his own. There is one plane where all the world is alike and there am I. Why am I not a peaceful man? Oh, average men are not the stuff of which to make great and interesting men. Let me be true to my nature. Let me enjoy crime. After all the tendency to crime is an inducement to virtue. Those who are always doing wrong are ever in condition of needing all their friends. That kills haughtiness. It makes me humble and fits me for repentance and contrition."

Night came swiftly upon the evening. Weary and hungry, Tanton still rode and the lights on the hills told him of the supper hour. Here were innocent homes where peace and childhood dwelt in heaven. Here were trysting places in the progress of the great comedy or the great drama of life, whichever it might be, and for him, he was crossed, he had no happy trysting place, the choice of his mind was stolen,—now perhaps, that she was free and saddened by experience might he again hope to win favor in her eyes. Ondell was not to be feared, who but Tanton would be the inevitable choice, that is,—after a suitable time?

"Tanton, Tanton," he kept repeating to himself, "you must be brave and cool in this matter and you will profit greatly. Some days go wrong, Tanton, they go wrong, and the misty cloud falls upon them,—some days are cold and sunshine fails to come,—the icy heart,—the frozen hand,—some days bring heat, the noontide burns the heart with fever and with weariness

and then there rests a sleepiness. Oh, life is a wonderful mystery!"

Not many miles remained now, the long road came to an end in the peaceful village among the hills, where a few houses, a courthouse, a jail and two lodging houses stood, strung out on little eminences, as it were,—a village, miles from riverway or railway,—a lonely place, if ever there was one. It was the county seat of a wild county and only in the valley of the Bourbese stood stately homes and rich farms, in the woody hills lived a rough, peculiar people, they who had been driven from the east to the west and who had followed the game into the wildernesses and migrated from one state to another, to get away from civilization, until they could go no farther—and who had hunted down the buffalo and the bear and the deer, who had driven the gentle and brave Alkansas and their allies, the Kappas and Mitchiganians, into the lands of the more nomadic peoples of the west,—into the lands of the Lastekas and the Nassonites and dared not follow them,—here they maintained their cabins and plugged the sugar tree and robbed the honeybee.

Their thriftier sons tilled the soil and when the old hunter died, his flintlock lay undisturbed on the deer horns over the door,—a relic of the old man, for the young man got his beef at the Saturday afternoon beef shoot.

Tanton's thoughts still pursued him and he felt that this had been the longest day that he had ever lived through. "I shall sleep to-night," he said to himself "but a wakeful, watchful sleep, such as a hunted stag

may find when his heart burns with fear. What a joy indeed, to be a stupid ox, to fall down into dreamless death and while he slumbers on, there is no care to break his spell. Rest?—Like the wary hare at night, lightly asleep, but ready to bound forth with the rustling of a wind-blown leaf. Rest?—Like some wise man without care who seeks his couch secure within the peaceful land and bare of midnight violence. Ah,—what changeful spells, what shadows are flitting by to alarm the watchful heart,—that yet must sleep!"

Then Tanton seemed to arouse himself from his reverie and he spurred on his horse, seeing that the journey was nearly done.

"Dang it, anyway," he exclaimed impatiently, "I must not be a baby!"

CHAPTER XV

TANTON TORQUAY TELLS GERAND OF A MURDER TRIAL
AND OF AN UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION FOR ONE
OF THE WITNESSES.

“Well, it is done. Ondell was found guilty and gotten years in durance. Poor fellow, poor fellow, he expected two, but then he might have gotten twenty. He ought to be satisfied. Some of us get a bad deal, friend Gerand, a bad deal.”

“Yes, it is a great misfortune. I suppose you did not lose your head about the property question? We are assured here for the time?”

“Well,—I will attend to that. Some things are indecent if too hastily done. He was so outdone over his new engagement as *arriere-vassal*,—”

“Talk United States, please.”

“I will see him again when he is more accustomed to his new situation. He is pervicacious to a trifle more than I relish and that, with his homicidal disposition, makes me cautious. He would not even talk to me when I went to console him,—I believe, upon my life, that he had acquired a sensation of intelligence,—”

“Tell me about the trial, the devil take his disposition, all men under the influence of cocktails are dangerous. He’ll kill you soon enough, don’t worry.”

“Well, I said in substance, that I took it to be in-

voluntary manslaughter, that in my capacity as deputy coroner I had adjudged that the deceased died of brain paralysis superinduced by the rupture of a blood vessel of the brain in the region back of the left eye. 'A queer proceeding, all of it,' said the prosecuting attorney, 'I'm a mind to have the corpse disinterred and have another examination made.' Then I thought of the quicklime that I had fixed him up with and I thought that in the interests of truth and justice I ought not to have put that in. 'Well,' said I 'you may do that.' I could not do otherwise than I did in the strict interests of the law. Miles are long in Aquitania and doctors are scarce, but you see, your honor, I was a deputy coroner before the commission of this crime and I happened to be present at the fight between the defendant and the deceased. I was not there by choice, it was accidental, had I known that homicide was about to be committed, naturally in the interests of my dignity as an officer of this county I would have been somewhere else. And,' says I, 'the defendant does not deny the essential accusations and the young lady has proved them and I'm sure she's a most unwilling witness. To be frank this defendant might easily have escaped had he wished to do so, I advised him to remain and take his chances with a case of involuntary manslaughter."

"You did?" asked the gump of an attorney, "you seem to be very friendly to the defendant." "Yes, says

NOTE.—Aquitania. Ancient name of Gascony. Now used poetically.

Gerand Hears the Verdict. 177

I, such is the case. But I do not defend him and I try to tell the truth, being neither for or against him."

"But the lady tells a story of a desperate encounter wherein a strong, well trained athlete was against a weak man and of beating him into insensibility while you seem inclined to take it lightly as if in some way the deceased had fallen against a stone and fractured his skull."

"I beg your honor's pardon, says I, there were no stones there. I said that the deceased come out of it with a blood vessel ruptured, anyway, says I, you can take it whichever way you like it, the young lady might have added blood to her imagination and have seen more than I did, I am sure that she would not willingly or knowingly harm this defendant or do aught to convict, indeed, I am satisfied that she told the truth as it appeared to her, possibly she is entirely right, I was drinking that day and might have been fuddled."

"You are a queer witness, Doctor Torquay," says that lynx-eyed spectacled fellow who seemed to have been born in a dubious frame of mind, "I don't like this case," said he.

"Well, who does?" said I, hotly, "I'm sure I'm not fond of it. I see a friend and one of our most highly respected citizens in jeopardy and I don't relish it one bit."

Ondell looked at me gratefully as I said this.

"Your remarks are entirely gratuitous," said the attorney, "you show partiality to the defendant every time you open your mouth."

"I'm sorry to be misunderstood," says I.

"That will do," says the lawyer as though he feared that I might make a bad break somewhere else.

"Well, that ended as all things will end and the poor devil is doing time now." Tanton said no more then for Gerand seemed to have arrived at one of his moments of logic or melancholy or something that set his brain to working.

"Murder, these days," said Gerand, "is so simple a thing, shoot, cut, poison, almost every hour, somewhere a fellow meets a violent end. The thread is so easily cut and so many people are inclined all the time to do the cutting that the spirit that is upon the people is something awful to contemplate. There is no belief in a hereafter to put in restraint, no withholding moral force, man looks upon his fellow as an animal whose life is not of consequence, that it requires but a little courage to nerve the hand to do him death, here to-day, one is clubbed to death, another is found in the river, this one in the underbrush with his throat cut and here is one with several buckshot through his chest. One would imagine that it needs a wonderful nerve to do these deeds, if so, wonderful nerve is dreadfully common. Murder stalks about everywhere and no man seems restrained by conscience or by a feeling of love, kinship or brotherliness, it is simply awful."

"Yes, it is terrible," said Tanton simply, though in fact the words impressed him greatly, "there is apparently no limit. And as there is no hereafter there is no reason why one might not profit by the incautious

situation of one of his fellows. If there is no reckoning, if there is nothing in any of the trifles of people's beliefs then why should one worry about the death of one of his fellows?"

"The soul, friend Tanton, the soul is dwarfed, ruined, damned, that is what they say."

"Foolish. Granting that there is a soul and that it is immortal, that in itself is proof palpable of its indestructibility. If one can pare the soul's finger nails or remove, dwarf or destroy the least fraction of it, then he can by the process of multiplication, destroy all of it and then it is not immortal. That is the solidest bit of argument ever thought of. What can the difference be what crimes I commit if they cannot alter in the least my soul?"

"Friend Tanton, I'm a countryman and know precious little. I cannot dissect that argument. But there is something in flesh and blood that tells me that it is wrong. That is about as far from the truth as I ever got and I know it."

"You do not mean,—"

"Yes, I mean that as sure as you live, you shall answer for your sins."

"Particularly me?"

"No, not you, I mean generally. There is a Ruling Spirit and justice is His Will!"

"When were you converted?" asked Tanton dryly.

"Never. I am quite unregenerate. I don't care. The other place does not worry me. I'll get to that worry soon enough. I simply don't care."

"Then you are a brave man. You believe that the

devil is after you and you don't care. That is what I call nerve," said Tanton.

"By God, it's so, nerve or no nerve," replied Gerand.

"Oh fudge," said Tanton, who did not like the conversation, "every fellow who comes to this fumid old house gets serious at once. Science, not literature or religion, is the positive influence of our day. Men have talked to nature in her varied moods and are enfranchised of her freedom. They have come to a larger conscience, a vaster comprehension. They see things differently. What frightened people years ago is now a common joke. Murder has happened in all ages and under the most varied and picturesque conditions. It is no new thing. The consciousness that it was a mortal sin and met with unpardonable punishment arose some two thousand years ago under the name of Christianity. Before that it was a regular business and there was no sheol perpended to it. After the rise of that religion men began to imagine things about murder. There was something wrong about it. It called for brimstone furnaces. The idea became deeply rooted. I tried to get back to the two thousand years or more that have gone and to eradicate the idea of the dreadfulness of murder from my mind. I have come to that rich hour in life where life and death are incidents and there is as little sin in being the father of one life as there is in being the executioner of another life. If it is murder unpardonable to kill man then it is just as bad to father man, the rule works both ways."

"Well, of course," said Gerand, "it's a gift to be able

to roll an idea into a knob and knock a man over with it. I suppose you are entitled to some credit for being able to do that. I cannot argue with you but all the same I know better."

"Why my dear Gerand, I could elucidate this subject to you until your hair would stand out like the business side of a clothes brush. It's a great subject! A thrilling subject!" exclaimed Tanton.

"Yes, no doubt! I'm easily startled," said Gerand, "but I don't scare worth a cent."

Tanton thought it a bright bonmot and laughed heartily. He needed to laugh and to drink in order to throw off the profound unrest that had settled upon him. His stoic, optimistic, fool-happy philosophies did not save him from pernoctation.

And Gerand was distressingly tantalizing this evening. It was not often that Gerand did any audible thinking, in fact, he passed for a countryman of limited attainments and whatever he thought, was natural thought, not that which is culled and elaborately pieced together. Ondell, Tanton and Sondalere, after their own fashions were thinkers and philosophers, but Gerand had only half a dozen well defined ideas and he clung to his small stock tenaciously. Tanton continued the talk on a different line, he wanted to get away from unpleasant subjects so, as he usually did, he commenced to discuss his projected literary effort. Some desultory words were passed concerning originality and Gerand found it unprofitable,—he was not literary.

"Some years of reading," continued Tanton, "crowds the brain with many good ideas of others.

We forget the connection and reissue them modified by our personality. The page of good things that waits to tell who said the several good things is a dull page. To please, it must glisten, gleam, be dot with diamonds and sprinkled with golden grained wit, the precious gem is the thing, where the brass that composes the plate that holds them came from is only of interest to those curious literary cross examiners who may at their infinite leisure find out when, how and by whom a good idea first arrived at chirographical eternity."

"Um huh!" responded Gerand. "I'd rather sail a four wheeled dugout in a six mule breeze any time than write a book."

Tanton found this vein of conversation unprofitable because Gerand manifested an inclination to snooze over it. His mind was sore distressed. He felt uneasy, he felt nameless fear, he knew not how to express it. He drank heavily, the intoxication would not come to his relief. Like the weak brain of an Indian, who, having experienced the strange brightness of intellect that came after drinking the fire water and who longs again to bring his feeble brain up to the heights, Tanton could not keep away from the subject that disturbed him.

"Why do men commit crimes?" he asked and Gerand awoke to the question.

"Why do men commit crimes? What will not men with starving children dare? What great excitement stirs the nerve when the cry of anguish is heard? When the body starves and is filled with the anguish

of many wants, real or imaginary, sane or diseased, I say, what will not men with starving children do?"

"You are right there. Under such conditions all men and especially all women are corruptible."

"Especially all men and mostly all women, I should think," said Gerand.

"Women over forty years of age are worse than men."

"I disagree. They are all alike. The men long for all the women and the women desire every man, but their modesty and their training holds them better in check."

"D'ye think so?" queried Tanton with a vague smile.

"Yes, all women have the inclinations of the courtesan. That phase of social evil is woman giving free rein to a natural inclination. The environments of society and the long in-breeding of a certain delicacy serves to hold a majority of women within bounds and the law attends to the men."

"Do you think that if all restraint was thrown off that the women would be worse than the men?"

"No, but it would be a terrible state of affairs."

"I didn't suppose that you cared about these things, not being altogether a pattern, my dear Gerand."

"Well, certain things are given to certain men. I have a profound respect for women and great sympathy for their weaknesses. My mother was in every respect an angel. Her state in life and all her surroundings made it an impossibility for her to be other than a perfect lady. I am glad of the conditions that

surrounded her because it made her life such that she has become to me an object of worship. If it hadn't been for that, Tanton, my soul would be utterly destitute for it has no capacity to worship anything but this. It is because of this that I am honest with women and let no man seduce them or speak ill of them if I can help it and if every one thought about it as I do, the barriers around our women would be so strong that temptation could never reach them."

"Holy Methodist! Are you sermonizing?"

"No, but I tell you, Tanton, in older countries where experience rules the roost, women are kept in the harem and veiled and they've got to be good or die. In this country where the women are no better than they are there, it is not practicable to keep them in cages, so we must throw around them other safeguards."

"Gerand, I always thought you to be a bad man, but it appears that you are a saint in disguise."

"You're a liar. I'm nothing of the kind. I care not for taking other people's money, it is a sore temptation to idleness and general cussedness and I would remove all such temptations. Money has no soul, but woman has a soul. Fooling with souls, Tanton, is a hell of a business."

"Don't preach, please."

"Not much. But my ideas about women are strong, very strong."

"Yes, rather ammoniac."

"No twitting please, I won't have it. My mother and all her sisters are goddesses after a fashion."

"You ought to be a monk and be shy of the gender and get in your requisite quota of sin by robbing the poor for the benefit of Peter's pence."

"Well, perhaps,—"

"For myself, I believe in going out among the sisters and having a good time."

"A libertine, eh?"

"No, not that, of course not."

"What is it then?"

"I don't know."

"Give me a horsethief every time! He is not the enemy of society, sapping its foundations. His sins are individual, the sapper undermines the whole social fabric. Murder is individual, but corrupting virtue is not individual, it is a general crime against humanity and especially against civilized society, it strikes at me and every other man for the corruptions of men hundreds of years ago lowered the whole community of women and made us the descendants of corrupt women. Had it not been for them we'd a come from honest mothers. The heads that were cracked and the purses that were lifted amount to no mention in history, but the hand of the libertine has written its history on you and me,—"

"By jimminy!"

"Yes, by jimminy! That's the only unpardonable sin that I know of. The dog that will lower one woman, will lower them all. He's a viper and his head must go under the heel of honest men."

"Like Tanton and Gerand? Gerand, you are borrowing trouble and you are too cussedly serious. Wo-

men are for use and abuse and if one stood always discreetly and reverently back, the population might suffer. Oh, thunder! Take one wife, take a dozen!"

"Yes, take one wife and if that is not enough take another, but be honest with them and don't set up a loose example. If you would marry two women or a dozen, go to a country where that is permitted and do the square thing by them,—"

"See here, Gerand, fill up that mouth with wine. By the way, since you are so virtuous you might be inclined to take my lady, who loves me so persistently and make something out of her, you can do it, I can not."

"Yes, I might. She appears to be a good girl."

"None better, I assure you. And incorruptible,—I assure you. Noble girl and her only fault is that she loves me and I love some one else. I would to God that she loved you."

"Sure enough? Tanton, I thought you made a monkey of that girl!"

"Not on your life! She's slightly demented as to my charms, that's all and for the life of me I cannot be rude to her. Try to wean her from her delusions. And begin at once. She's a good girl, Gerand, as far as I know and she needs a noble thinker like you to manage her."

"You are jesting." Gerand filled his glass again and he was quite mellow already.

"I am not jesting, do what you can for me, possibly you may find great good in her." Tanton pulled out his purse and opened it. Gerand observed that is was

well filled and remarked, "Some one will rob you if they see that."

"No they won't," replied Tanton, "I'm in that business myself."

He handed Gerand a couple of bills. "Here, buy a new suit of clothes and try your hand at Miss Eloine Terren."

Gerand pocketed the money with a smile.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONDELL AIDED BY PHILLEO MAKES A SUCCESSFUL RUN
FOR LIBERTY AND SUBSEQUENTLY MEETS A REPENT-
ANT SINNER IN A GRAVEYARD.

The whole force of the blow that had fallen upon him, seemed not to have been realized by Ondell until after his first night had been spent on a narrow hard board in a cell with three other criminals. The country jail was quite luxurious to this. There he had whatever he wanted by paying for it, here he had been deprived of everything,—even his hair they had begrimed him. The night had been one of incessant thought. He reviewed the whole of his misfortunes and he arrived at the conclusion, whether or not it was true, that he had been a fool.

“Ten years of this? Oh God, have mercy upon me! I suppose I might become accustomed to it and get hardened and uncaring, but all my life I shall be a convict and no gentleman will ever claim me for a friend! And Dolee? Oh, my soul, how have I fared in the destinies of the world! I ought to have made my escape,—I have no business here. Confound it, why did I not go when I could? Dolee looked at me unflinchingly and I seemed to see a silent pleading in her eyes, I remember that look, perhaps she reproached herself that she had been the cause of it. I wonder if

she yet has a kindly feeling for me? How accursed it was that Eloine Terren had to be around and see my misfortune, Tanton might have saved me had it not been for her. I do not understand this thing yet. She had no interest in convicting me, Tanton ought to have attended to her."

As the night wore on slowly, his fevered brain continued to work unceasingly. Tears came into his eyes. He had faced the greatest degradation that could come to a man and he who was so sensitive, was more degraded than most any other man would have been.

"I must get out of this! The governor must pardon me. Father did him a good turn once, but it would not look right for him to favor me at once. Some time must pass and I must endure it. They said I was to work in the office keeping books for these devils, that is not so very bad and Tanton said he would arrange it for me to have an easy berth, I must try to be brave and endure it. Have I not always been a brave man? My heart has been courageous under every strain, I have never flinched,—will I be able to undergo this? I will not do it! I will get out of here if I die the next minute. I will be free. I will not be disgraced. I am disgraced. I will die and be done with it."

"Soy there, bunk three, keep your guzzle shut, will you?" said his brother in the lower tier and Ondell was mortified by the rebuke. He had unconsciously given voice to his sufferings and had disturbed his companions.

After that he guarded himself better, but tossed

around in the greatest of misery until morning came and the bells sounded the hour of rising. Then he filed into the long room and sat at the table with all his brothers and emptied his tin cup and mechanically chewed his beef and bread. Then he marched into the office and his brothers went back into the shops to toil for the State.

Ondell soon understood what was required of him and he wielded a ready and beautiful pen. He wrote calmly and steadily, copying, transcribing, trying to forget himself in the ardor of his new vocation. When the noon bell sounded he was sorry, for it was necessary for him to march back and rejoin his brothers in the long room for a while. He dreaded that, because he felt so ashamed of himself and in such abominable company. Then he marched back to his desk and plunged into his work again. He sat in a corner by himself and where he was, it was quite a lonely place. No one seemed to worry about him, except that occasionally, a guard walked by and peered over his shoulder to see that he worked.

Suddenly he heard a voice that greatly surprised him and he looked up quickly.

“Geezuz whizz,” exclaimed Philleo, who had, in his surprise, gotten his favorite exclamation turned around, “How in the name of,—”

“Never mind about that, Philleo, what are you in for?”

“In? Why dammit, I’m a guard. I got a job here.”

“Glad to hear it. So have I. Said I killed Sondal-
ere.”

"You astonish me, Ondell, you ain't no business bein' here."

"You might be good to me while I'm here, Philleo, for the old time's sake."

"Right you air. I'll help you out some day."

"How did you get in here?" asked Ondell.

"Well, you see it war this-a-way. The people down thar elected the old man to the legislature and the gas company put three thousand dollars into an onvelope and put it into his desk for a vote. Then the people hearn of it and called a mass meetin'. They axed dad if it war so about that thar money. Yes, says Dad, I'm here to tell you that it is and furthermore that it beats raisin' corn on poor land all to blazes. So to placate Dad, cause he had to resign, they got a place for me an' I thought that this war next to the governorship when hearn about it, but it aint."

However, so fur, it has beat raisin' corn on poor land, but I'd ruther be a clodhobber anytime. Say, you never killed that feller and if you did you done the right thing to him. You aint no business to be in here."

"Let me out then."

"I don't care if I do."

"It will be worth more to you than your Dad's vote on the gas bill."

"Don't mention it. Anything that I kin do for an old friend and schoolmate I'll do it cheerfully. But this is a sly business."

"Philleo, I once thought that I could be satisfied with any fate and that life held so little for me, that

anywhere would do to pass it, but this is not what my melancholy imagined it to be. Misery does not love this kind of company. I'd rather be free and be a fugitive and an outcast, than a convict."

"Me too. And a guard is about the same thing as bein' a convict. I'm tired of all of it 'ceptin my salary. Say, I musn't be here too long. This evenin' when I get to the gate, you will git thar too and I'll let you slip through. You make a dash for the house across the street and go over the palin' fence like a cat before a brickbat. You'll find the front lower room open and my clothes thar. Help yourself and then git out of town. If any one sees you makin' that dash you'll be a goner, if they don't, you stand a good chance. Just before six thar'll be a scarcity of guards round here and it will be gettin' dusk this time o' year. After you're gone, I'll raise the devil about it at once, so be careful."

"I'll be quick enough and if I get out I'll stand by you Philleo."

"Don't mention it. So long."

Philleo stauntered on unconcernedly and looking as stern as it was possible for him to look. "Darn it, I've got to be careful about that thar business," he mused to himself, "but I can't see his Royal 'Anxiety in this place,—gosh, it disturbs the aristocracy of our county. Oh, well, hellsfire, faint heart never sells on the installment plan. Gee whizzus, if they catch me at this thing, they'll plaster me with hot 'ell shore. I must get around to the switchyard an' see whose got the inside track this evenin'."

But Philleo was not a whit less daredevil than he was in the wild hills of Gascony and the peppery undertaking rather amused him. He cared not the least for the outcome so far as he was concerned, not more so than his Dad did, when he voted for the gas bill.

Promptly, a little before six o'clock when the guards were superintending the march to the supper table, the iron gate opened for a second and a tall, powerful man slipped through and made the most famous run of his life. The distance was short, the place was lonely for the reason that the penitentiary was situated in a small town and its inhabitants did not care to live under the shadow of the penitentiary. The method of escape was simple and comparatively easy under these circumstances.

Ondell lost no time in getting into the other clothes and picking up the blacking box rubbed his face with its contents and the next moment as good a counterfeit of a negro as the limited time could make one, walked out leisurely and down the road towards the woods.

Under cover of the woods he ran as fast as he could and until he was tired out. Then he came to a small stream and after the manner of fugitives waded in it for a long time. Then he struck out again desperately, knowing that he had fifty miles to go before he reached home. His idea was to go Thousand Stair and let Tanton conceal him in the Cavern until some months had passed and then he would provide himself with means and go to a foreign land and renew the struggle for happiness.

He believed that he could trust Tanton, had not

Tanton offered him this means of escape? Had he not befriended him? Yes, it was safe for him to do this, for once in Cavern Hall, no one would follow him there and he could easily be provided with food. He was rather elated at his safe delivery and his steps were stronger than they had been for some time previous. The crime had weighed upon him and his depression of spirits had been something terrible, now he felt that he had thrown it all off and had essayed to begin life anew under another clime.

Ondell walked all night and when morning came he took out a small piece of looking glass and carefully arranged his toilet so that a chance white spot on his cheek need not betray him. It was autumn now and the woods abounded with wild fruit, such as grapes, pawpaws and nuts. He soon found enough to satisfy his hunger and pushed on. He was an expert woodsman, having spent the greater part of his life in the tree-grown places amid the sweetness of the whispering leaves.

He did not fear capture, because in these woods, no man could be captured unless tracked by bloodhounds and this country had never had any such dogs. The authorities of the penitentiary themselves never expected to see him again and the pursuit was soon abandoned, because it was a useless pursuit. The inhabitants of this country were few and it was actually forty miles between stores. Occasionally, a house could be seen half a mile off from the stage road and there lived a woodsman who had been driven out of Virginia and then out of Kentucky and had finally set-

tled down to die in Missouri. The counties of Osage, Maries, Gascony and Phelps were in greater part wilderness. Where Ondell lived, a brisk settlement had been made, but he needed not to go far to strike Panky Hollow, the land of Thin Whiskers, Hookeydall and the Heelstring Nation. These were wild places where the "American" boys were in evidence, to the detriment of the foreign born. They were small settlements that subsisted almost wholly upon the game of the surrounding thirty or forty miles of wilderness. Ondell and his companions represented native or foreign born families who had given up the chase for the farm and had prospered in consequence. They lived in big houses made of sawn limestone and cultivated the vine over the front gate, whereas, the others lived in log cabins with the coon skins tacked out to dry on its unhewn sides and they eat corn pone and smoked venison and defied the tax collector.

On the evening of the day after his hasty exit from durance vile, Ondell found himself close to his home, in fact, about five miles away and on a little hill that stood in the forest. Perhaps an acre had once been cleared away and a heavy puncheon fence had been built around it. Then the trees had grown up again in many places showing that it had been for many years devoted to the purpose of the country's burying ground. There were quite a number of graves there and at the head of some of them, a huge rock had been placed with the initials or the name of the deceased roughly hewed upon its side. In several places a pretentious slab of sandstone had been cut into a suit-

able size to cover the grave and had been raised over it by smaller rocks placed under it. One or two had marble tombstones which was proof palpable that they had come fifty miles at least over the rough country in an ox wagon.

A lonelier place at night could not be imagined. Here Ondell found himself as the gathering darkness overtook him and he seated himself on one of the tombs to rest his weary legs and cogitate upon the problem of how to make himself known to Tanton, later in the night, without awakening the servants. Tanton alone must know of his arrival, he believed that he could trust his servants, but several of his friends had, before this, been caught in a bad place from too much believing.

Ondell sat a long time in this dreary place and, in fact, dozed into a gentle slumber. He was very tired and very hungry. He wished that the journey was ended, he dreaded the remaining five miles. They seemed longer to him than the forty-five that he had walked since the night before.

Then he was suddenly aroused by hearing a noise and not knowing what it was and being unarmed, he rolled down beside the grave and lay still. "I wonder if, after all, there are ghosts," he said mentally, "no one could have business here at this hour." The moon was not yet up and he could not see any one, yet he was conscious of the approach of footsteps. He was woodsman enough to know that the tread was not that of an animal. He heard the swish of a riding switch and yet nearer came the steps. Then he heard them

no more and for a long time it was silent in the graveyard, as it ought to have been at that hour of the night. He raised his head and peered about him. At a short distance from him he could barely distinguish the outline of a man. He stood by one of the graves and his head was bowed.

Ondell waited in breathless silence for something to occur and presently the nocturnal visitor broke into a soliloquy that revealed to him some things that he had not hitherto suspected,—so grave a doubt came into his naturally dubious disposition that he shuddered to think of the chances that he ran with him,—this man must be surprised in the quiet of his chamber and discreetly bought out,—anything else was too dangerous to be entertained for a moment,—this thought came upon him, almost like a revelation.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONDELL, IN HIS DISGUISE, HAS AN INTERVIEW WITH TANTON AND THEN RESUMES HIS JOURNEY.

As soon as Ondell heard the voice, he knew that it was that of Tanton and after all, this visit did not greatly surprise him, the solitary and unquiet doctor rode mostly at night to visit patients, he had been startled by him so many times, so often had Tanton slipped up upon him as he rode the highways, that this seemed quite a natural experience.

But what his business might be was another matter. Then he began a rambling talk to himself and intensely secretive by nature, all that he said to himself, in the secret place would hardly have accused him of anything. The dreamy, tender voice of Tanton had never a better field wherein to air its beauties than in this lonely and of a certainty, secluded place. His thoughts and the expression he gave to them were sadly misnamed, his fluency of language and natural vein of poetry, concealed so well his character,—in this respect, he was a gifted man and his art, in nobler pursuits might have been of great good,—it was ever thus, the shadow and the light were twain together and the brilliance of the light is offset by the blackness of the shadow. Yet, perhaps, nothing could so well illustrate the vagueness and doubt that filled his mind

as the rambling speech that he gave. Verily, he knew not, in the darkness of his time and place. The learning of man was his sole refuge and he tossed about without an anchor.

"Some men are distraught with despair, they imagine that upon the air there might hang so doubtful a thing as the curse of Cain. At night, their dreams bring fears that will not away in the morning light. They cast a brand upon the face. I am afraid. Yes, I am afraid. Why do I tremble and sleep lightly? Is it not imagination? Am I not master of my fancies? Indeed, I am not. What great art is it, what great art to put the pause upon one's thoughts and still them in their places so that men need not think. What art is that, that man has lost, oh, the mercy of the art. Sweet is the lethe of death, a sinking away of the anguished nerves, sweeter still were it, if the anguished nerve might sleep and when 'tis wanted, to call it from its slumbers, but it is a secret and I fear that I shall never know it. When the summer's light is dim, in the skies that fill the west and the sun shines no more on the golden fields of Aquitania, I dream of one so pure and fair and startle myself from the sweet lethe of that dream, a damned dream! Thorn and thistle grow upon me and prick me in my dreams and make me always half awake. I fancy now that I can hear the soft entrancement of her lonely song, such as she sang, e'er I had made myself known, as, when the gentle evening waned, I would steal upon her as she lingered underneath the oaks that stood about her father's house. But she loved me not, nor Sondalere,

she loved Ondell, oh blissful man, had he but known it. What damned treachery fell upon him! I dream out my unsatiated life! Must I not be gentle to her, and then, perhaps,—who will tell? Pshaw! I waste my time. I must be desperate with her, I have been too gentle. She will not? Then, indeed, she will. If there is, my dear Tanton, an anguish of nature, where the air is direfully beset with thunderousness and with searing flash, there is after that but nature that has melted into most benignant sunshine. I must strike her with the storm, the smiles of a cleared sky will come after that. Tanton, you are young and comely, but no one loves you. You have grace of every kind, but you are a person, old and gray and in your ancient heart the cold and lifeless ghosts of trouble,—” then he was suddenly still and Ondell waited impatiently for him to go on. He had not learned much, it was true, only that Tanton loved Dolee and that did not matter much to him, she could never again bear the sight of him who had slain her husband, but the impulse to reveal himself to Tanton died within him, insight warned him, he had come to seek this man, there was something about him that forbid it now. Perhaps he was too wise in the arts of personality to disturb an erratic man in his meditations, having gone rigorously to school to himself. This was not the place to approach Tanton for help.

Presently the lonely man resumed his meditations and Ondell did not relish that so much. He had half a mind to frighten him away, he trembled for him, lest he should commit his sins to the grave.

"The moon rises brightly, the cry of the night that few may hear, is heard. It is the voice of darkness, the voice I know. The hour of witching when the pale world rises upon me. A few tears might ease my heart, why was not I granted a few tears? The time of ghostly dreams is on, the mind sleeps, the temper of cold steel has passed, the strong man of the day is wearied in the coming of the moon and seeks the balm of its healing. A heavy hand was laid upon him," and he laughed so lifelessly that Ondell felt a chill. "Ondell! Ondell! you served your part and must I reckon with you too? Ah, let them go, one to the judgment of eternal dust, yet, I cannot forget them and nowhere on earth do they come to me as they do in this place. I'll be glad when time's sure erosion has taken them from my mind."

He walked around then and madly swished his riding whip. "This is a strange speech," commented Ondell, "if I remain here, he is liable to walk on me." The moon was now up and Ondell arose quietly and sauntered towards the doctor. When he neared him he spoke.

"Hello, Boss!"

The effect was electrical. Tanton turned quickly and with great astonishment. He saw a hideous black face before him and he fiercely raised his whip. His voice was almost diabolical in its mingled fear and anger and he frightened Ondell by the suddenness of his outburst.

"You black beast, you devil, you,—!"

"Good God! What a gentleman!" Ondell hardly expected so violent a greeting.

"Who are you?" Tanton knew then that it was not some hideous nightmare that had come upon him. The voice assured him that he had only a man to deal with and he did not fear a man.

"Who is I? I'm de man dey calls Swatchy, but my real name is Wilyum Ivory Sunshine an' I'm de only nigger in the kentry. What's I doin'? I'm scarin' up de possum like I does every night."

"You have no business in this place!"

"Whaffor not? Dey aint no church in dis kentery whar de bells ring out in de mawnin', 'Come coons, come coons.'"

"So you do your praying here, eh?"

"Yas, boss, I been comin' here since de devil was er boy."

"I'm a mind to give you a course of sprouts for scaring the life out of me."

"You don't know me very well, does you? I was er contraband, long fore de wah an' I kin pull up a loose rock with you, right here to-night, ef you flourishes dat whup!"

"You'd run, if you had a cannon, your race is cowardly, cowardly and mean."

"You got that wrong, boss. You lay dat whup on me an' I'm er comin' to see you."

"You are a saucy beast and you ought to be hung out of existence, all of you."

"Boss, does you love your fellerman? Is you a christian?"

"No, I'm no christian and you're none of my family. I wouldn't see one of you emancipated, you ought to be my slave and I'm a mind to take you home with me."

"Well, you can't do it. 'Couse, I aint carin' much 'bout de 'mancipation of my race jist now, de question am de 'mancipation of dis ev'nin's appetite. Dat's what I'm here for. Anyhow, you ought to be charitable to me and quit cussin' me like dat."

"Confound you! Where did your kind of cattle come from anyway?"

"Das de way. White man smoke de good cigah an' de nigger catch de ashes. But you quit callin' me a cow, I'm as white as any man, I is."

"Rot, you black and yellow, mud colored, jackass of humanity."

"No, I aint, nuther. I'm as white as any man, only I has a dark way of shoin' it. De straight end of my hair am growin' inside, das de difference. An' remember, white man, dat de mos' wonderful dis-
kivery dat de white man ever made was how to git de yaller man,—somebody's my uncle, fo' shore. Now smoke dat!"

"I'll swish you one, just for your impertinence!"

"Last man dat tried dat was consid'bly worried 'fore I got through wif him, he seen de moon er foot off. I aint in good sorts nohow, for me, de sun shone all night, last night, an' I'm er spilin'. Say, white man, in de lan' of de free, you aint er showin' good sperit to-night, you mout need me some time. 'Couse, I can't vote, in some of dese blame kenterys you can't

do dat when youh face am de color of youh shoes, but I can help you bout dat man Undell what you was speakin' bout."

"What the deuce are you driving at?"

"Oh, I aint er drivin' at nothin'. I want you to let me er lone. I aint done you nothin' an' remember, white man, dat when de bline man feels his way long de side of de houses in de street, he never kin know how many fellers, what's sittin' nice an' comf'-table, done git up and move dere chairs outen his way, wifout sayin' a word."

That amused Tanton and he laughed.

"Eh, uncle, it's a hard job to be a monarch in Africa?"

"I dunno bout dat. But when anything happens in dis kentery, de nigger done it, when a hoss gets toted away in de gloomerin' de nigger done it. Dey don't spect dat fren of youh's."

"Who is that? Gerand? Why he is an honest man."

"Well, das all right. Say Doc, I used to think you was soft and milky and good natured. Dis evenin' have opened my eyes an' I can see a whole mile. Does you need anybody to help you kill er few of your enemies?" Ondell laughed.

"Yes, when Ondell gets out of jail, I'll put you on to him and you can do him as you please."

"Yas? I reckon I'll do him quicker'n anybody else will. But you are a cussed sinner, now fo' shore, Gosh, I kin see through you now!"

"I can put a curtain over you, you black devil, and by the gods, I believe I will."

"You won't nuther. I done got my cannon right hayr an' ef thar's any mournin' to be done, it aint gwine to be in my fambly."

"You're a bad nigger Swatchy, I've heard of you."

"Yes an' I done hearn about you too. You used to worry 'round dat sweet missus Dolee fore she found you out."

"Say that again and I'll break your neck."

"De monkey, de faster he sleeps, de faster he sticks to de limb. I done tol' you not to try it. I'm an old man, lookin' ebry day a little deeper in my grave, but I can't stand no foolishness. You must let dat widder alone and tend to youh business. Ders's a man a layin' for you ebry night,—ebry night,—so help me grashus, an' he'll kill you, he'll do it for shore."

"Will he? Who is he?"

"Oh, dat's massa Undell."

Tanton laughed loud.

"Uncle, you're behind the times. Ondell is a convict. He is in the penitentiary and there is where he ought to be."

"Go way! Den it can't be him, but it's some feller dat I hearn talkin' 'bout dat an I thought for shore it wus Undell. But it was a feller for shore, last time I wus down to Panky Holler I done hearn about it."

"You did, eh? I've killed a better man than the one that said it. You can tell him that next time you see him."

"For shore, you done killed youh man? Me too. Tell me 'bout yourn and I'll tole you 'bout mine."

"You are lying."

"No, I got de papers for dat. I ses, ses I, you might git drunk some day an brag 'bout it, an some feller might 'spute dat and den I'd haf to show up or fight. Oh, I done got de papers for my killin'. You got youhs?"

Tanton laughed again and then turned on his heel and went to the gate where his horse was hitched.

"Good night, Swatchy. I've got enough of you for one night."

Ondell was glad that he had gone. He waited until the horse had passed into the darkness of the valley and then he followed. When he came to the creek he carefully washed himself and was once more a white man.

"All this is very strange," he said to himself, "very strange. Tanton has a bad disposition. He hates his fellow man. I declare he seemed to exult in the fact that I was where I belonged. By the eternity! Tanton referred to me as one that was a good riddance. If I did not know the man I'd suspect that he wished me out of the country. And maybe he does? By George! My removal and that of Sondalere was just in his hand. Oh, no, I can surely trust him." But Ondell kept on revolving this in his mind and the nearer home he got, the clearer it seemed to him that he could not put himself in jeopardy with Tanton. The conviction began to grow upon him so strongly that he stopped and sat on a log for a while to think it all out.

"By George! Are all of us cranks? Every one of us has a screw loose. All alike, always have said so,

crooked spines, side tracked noses, ill shapen brain, spleenish souls, it's the way of the world. One thing is certain, if there is a blissful abode in Nirvana or Paradise, there are none of us hunchbacks there. The abnormal men do not excel in the crafts and of course, they don't get to heaven. A lost leg is a clipped brain. God writes on a man with a legible hand, is an old saying. Never trust a man with a club foot, is another. The man who hates his fellow because he is black, is a moral hunchback and cannot be trusted. Consequently, I dare not trust Tanton. And for being so uncharitable as to malign the hunchback and the club foot, I too, am a moral degenerate and, consequently, I'd be a fool to trust myself. I'd best not carry the speculation too far. They are all fallacies like so many others bandied around in the land of brains. Moral deformity ought to be a bar to heights of mental excellence. But, by the eternity that waits, there you are! The sublime rogue usually succeeds and the monster of vice is the king of his fellows. Oh well. A cold rogue, a cool brain. I wonder what defects have Tanton and I? We are not insane, we are somewhat like nine tenths of our fellows,—well it don't matter."

Then he got up and walked on. He was now close to his home, but no lights shone in the windows. Usually, at this hour, the servants were up and some appearance of life was thrown into the old place but now there was none. The beacon still shone and burned as from a pipe that had burned steadily for a year and a day. He knew in the distance that the

light had burned every day from the hour of his departure to that of this lonely and sad homecoming.

Ondell had made up his mind in reference to Tanton. He would steal into the house and try to find his servant Androche. He could trust Androche, he was reasonably sure of that, but his objection to him was that he was liable, in his customary absentmindedness, to tell the secret to the first fellow he met. He must get Androche by the neck and for once impress him that all of his remaining mind must be concentrated on the fact that Ondell was not around. After a few days, he would be able to approach Tanton. If he could make the cave, Androche would attend to his wants and he would be reasonably safe.

Having determined upon this line of action, he set out bravely to go around the hill to the rear entrance and while on his way there, he saw another sight that revealed to him a still darker side of the character of Tanton,—the friend in whose keeping he had given his mansion and to a certain extent his life.

Tanton had ridden away from the graveyard and Ondell had walked with weary step. Some time had elapsed since he left there, possibly it had taken him three hours to make the distance because he had stopped by the creek and at other places, in a certain hesitancy as to what to do.

In the meantime Tanton had one of his usual experiences and it was his last interview with Eloine Terren,—the girl that he had wronged.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GERAND AND ELOINE RIDE TOGETHER AND MEET TANTON
WHO IS IN BAD HUMOR AND DEFIES HIS ENEMIES.

While Ondell toiled up and down, with heavy step, Tanton galloped on briskly and when he neared the mansion he met Eloine and Gerand. It seemed that Gerand, though he had taken the dare of Tanton in jest, had really thought better of it and had in some manner unbosomed himself to Eloine. That his efforts, whether in earnest or in jest, had been fruitless, was evident. The character of Gerand was vague and hard to understand. One never knew when he jested and when he meant what he said. He was not an un-handsome fellow, he had a broad frankness and a sarcastic smile, which, united with a silent demeanor, gave him rather a wise look.

Eloine Terren was not a beautiful girl. Her eyes were blue and her hair was golden. Her features were regular and when adorned for inspection, she was not bad to the eye. Yet she had no claims to beauty and an artist would not be likely to select her for a model. However, her face had an intellectual cast and she was not without wit or sense. It was indeed surprising, that she had fallen so completely under the dominion of Tanton,—but human nature

hath strange likes and follows its gods into unusual places.

Gerand was not beyond Eloine in any points of beauty or in that of sense. In reality, they were a couple well suited to each other and that is perhaps why they could not join together. It was the old story of human nature afflicted with rotary and contradictory tendencies. It would have been well for Eloine to have made a life issue with Gerand and it would have been good for him also, since he but needed a wiser head than his own, to have made him thoroughly respectable.

Eloine still clung to the ghost of Tanton's love. She felt that he must right her wrongs and that she could not and would not enter married life with anyone but him. Eloine had sobered down to life in its reality, she was not giddy as she was in the callow days when she first met Tanton, but her determination not to be outdone by him and be left a wreck of morality upon the beach, had intensified. She would not listen to Gerand and she even doubted his sincerity. As said, Gerand's sincerity was ever a doubtful proposition.

In this humor,—though their mutual exploitation of like and dislike, had not made them any worse friends,—they met Tanton and perhaps both were in condition to deal harshly with him. Eloine had been pressed to an answer by Gerand, he was curious about reasons, he must delve into things, if he was not as good as some other man he wished to know the reason. He had questioned and questioned provokingly, he would know the reason, if any there was, why Tanton found

such unparalleled favor in her eyes,—and Eloine had in a moment of forgetfulness or under stress of long and continuous disappointment, half revealed to him, why it was impossible for her to consider any one but Tanton.

Consequently, Gerand was wiser than he was at the outset and his opinion of the veracity and other good qualities of his friend Tanton had diminished. He had an excellent nobility of character in respect to the weaker half of the common family and this was food for his pet subject. He had been imposed upon by Tanton and he did not like such an imposition. Tanton had recommended her to him as spotless and while he had taken his proposal in jest, when he thought of it later, it seemed to him that he might do worse and at the same time he would do the peerless Tanton a great favor. Tanton had now apparently gained the way to wealth and he had declared that Gerand came after him. But now he had come to believe that he would come a long time after and Tanton's peerlessness became encrusted with divers scales and murky mud.

Gerand cared very little which way the wind blew. He was not scrupulous in money matters. He felt that he could paddle a good sized boat under any circumstances and he hoped for great help from Tanton, but now he was in a humor not to care whether Tanton helped him or not. And as he became angry over his friend's duplicity, he grew a desire to chide him soundly at the first opportunity.

When, therefore, these met Tanton, there was every

evidence of the latter's troubles having multiplied. He reined up as he neared them and the moon shone full upon him. His lips parted disclosing a full set of white teeth, he smiled because he met them thus together, perhaps, after all, he would be rid of his *in-amorata*.

"I am glad to meet you, my friends, and I hope that you have enjoyed a pleasant ride."

"I have not," returned Gerand, sullenly.

"No? I should think that with so good a lady as my constant friend Eloine that one ought to spend a pleasant hour under any circumstances."

"But for the exception," said Gerand.

"The exception? You mystify me."

"Well, it need not."

"Gerand, my boy, you speak in riddles. When I was in the city," continued the doctor, for he liked to talk of his experiences in the city, "when I was in the city, where they give plays founded on table sauce and what not, I chanced to know of a bit of by-play that amused me. A lady, who owned a store had a pet lion cub and also a pet clerk. One day the cub tore the clerk's hand and he was so put out about it that he took several thousand of her dollars and departed. Before he got beyond the confines of Aquitania, he was arrested. Then he telegraphed to her to leave him alone or he would come back and sue her for several thousand dollars damages in addition to that which he already had and besides would tell a tale out of school. The lady minded not the threat of damages but the tale out of school was another matter and she wired

the police to let him go, he's too bad a man to be returned. Perhaps you can find a parallel in this. From your humor, I discern that you have been discussing me and that is always a provoking subject." Tanton laughed in his own way and waited for Gerand to say on. He had purposely told this incident in order to make Gerand tell what had transpired.

"I do not read your riddle, Tanton, but I have arrived at the conclusion that it is time for you to stop your foolishness and marry.—"

It was a dangerous subject and Tanton hastened to interrupt.

"No doubt, no doubt, that in the devious ways of fate, the girl that I ought to have married, was drowned before I met her. No doubt, girls have been drowned that I ought to have married,—fate intended them for me, but you see they missed me because of that. We won't discuss it. The project to put the blind, deaf and consumptive and also the mentally lame and halt into a separate institution, beyond marriage, meets with my approval. Let them have free love and I'll join the institution on the ground of mental infirmity."

"This is no time for frumpery," said Eloine, "we are not in a mood to be guiled by the gift of anecdote, nor to play with a honey-buzzard. Tanton, this honest friend of yours will not have aught of me because of you."

"You are a fool to talk that way."

"Tanton, I know your trail in this matter," said Gerand, "Miss Eloine has confided to me her secret and as

a secret I shall respect it. But you ought to be honest with her and not leave it to me."

"The hell you say, you infernal blabbers. Eloine, why will you persist in maligning me?"

Gerand laughed. "I told her that you said that she was a perfect lady and she said to me that she hoped that you had not found it imperatively necessary to tell me that as a warning. Tanton, you are not a fool, but you are not honest. You ought to deal justly with this beautiful young lady, she is worthy of either of us and however much I am willing to share her fortunes and misfortunes, she is right when she says that you are the one to share them."

"Oh, you fools! You are but making monkeys of idiots. What do you take me for? What right have you to give me advice?"

Gerand simply rode on and answered not. He had, perhaps, said more than he intended. It was not his quarrel and he had permitted a generous impulse to get the better of him. So he reverted to his habitual silence and rode on. He did not care to quarrel with Tanton at this stage of the game and he had been incautious. He had something at stake that he must not lose. When to himself, he laughed over the comedy and felicitated himself that he would have some sport guying Tanton.

"You are a fool, a fool!" said Tanton to Eloine, "that man loves you and you have not sense enough to do the best you can. He will marry you, Eloine and you ought to jump at the chance."

"Tanton you do not really mean that, after all these years, do you?"

"Yes, I meant it."

"You do not intend to marry me?"

"I do not."

"Then you have lied."

"Yes, then I have lied."

"I will tell all that I know of you!"

"And get in jail for perjury."

"No matter."

"Yes it does matter. Your son will starve."

"And you would see him starve?"

"I would. Say one word and both of us will go down together."

"Tanton you have always promised me,—"

"Yes, I am always promising."

"Tanton, you are not yourself to-night. You don't mean this?"

"Perhaps not. The devil is in me and you might as well let me alone to-night. I am sorry that you were rude to my friend Gerand."

"I was not rude to him and I told him very little. He merely guessed the truth and what he told you, surprised me. Tanton, I have always been true to you and I do not want to have anything to do with Gerand. You are jesting with me and it is a sacred matter."

"You think so? You had better take him, it will be one of your last chances. He is a good man,—excellent fellow,—fine tempered,—fine grained,—noble, see how chivalrously he champions your cause, he is nob-

ler than I, he is a better man. I realize my unfitness for you and I have interested myself to provide you with one better than myself. I am sorry that you cannot be rational in this. Gerand will have a fine farm if you marry him and you can then realize your hope of a home."

"It is not home only, it is more than that. I want an honest name."

"Well, that will be an honest name. Gerand,—why, Gerand, is as honest a name as there is in the world. You will have your heart's desire then, honest name,—and I will give you the finest farm in Hookeydall for a wedding present."

"You will? Then you must be prosperous now!"

"Well, you see, my dear, Ondell has been called up from the serried ranks to the plumed front and to a sure place. When one of the herd goes up to the front he is apt to discard some of his minor treasures. Just so, Ondell has provided for me and just as soon as you get sense enough to see the admirable qualities of our mutual friend, I'll proceed to make you the big lady of the bottom. And it's a rich bottom,—richest in the world. There you will have honor, home and those who malign you, may some day have a mortgage to pay into your purse and you can deal with them accordingly. Ha, my lady, be wise for once."

Tanton whipped up his horse unexpectedly and dashed by her, without giving her time to answer. He knew what her answer would be and he did not want to hear it. He did not want her answer to-night,—to-morrow after she had slept on it and after she had

breakfasted with it and seasoned it with the air of morning, she would have a clearer judgment. He trusted to vanity,—to all minute circumstances,—he believed that he had told her just what he ought to have told her and that the conclusion would be as he wished it.

“Dod bummit!” he exclaimed, “it took me a month to learn what to tell her, but I knew I’d get it out right sometime!”

Then he rode on and then he stopped and looked at the road and noted that he had taken the wrong one.

“My steps are ever directed towards Dolee. She scorns me too. What is it that draws me like a magnet? By God, a magnet? Can I not find a magnet wherewith to draw her? Where are the curious arts of Sondalere? Alas, they are not all in his grave, but I know none of them. B’gosh, there’s where my education has been neglected.

What did that nigger, What’s-his-name say? Oh, yes, some one waited for me with the malicious intention of sinking a lead mine into my anatomy. Oh, well, let them try it.”

Still he rode on in the wrong direction. In fact he did not care where he went. He was in the midst of one of those peculiarly desperate hours, when life and death were as nothing. After a long ride, though his horse went swiftly along, he turned suddenly and found himself at the gate of the home of the widow for whom he would, any time, give his life. Would he go in? No, she would not see him. An unaccountable dislike had taken her. He had heard it said, that

though he was the only doctor in the country, she would die before she called him in sickness.

But a strong impulse was upon him. He would force himself into her presence and pour out such a tale of love and devotion, that she could not resist him. Had he not the words and the power?

Presently his mind took another direction. A brilliant idea came into his perverted intellect and it was in keeping with Tanton. He was true to himself and he would play the diplomacy of hades with her.

With his new possession, whose faint cry he had easily stifled, he galloped again down the long road by which he had come and he rode wildly as some messenger in the heat of battle. The frenzy of exultation,—the frenzy of desperate hope filled his mind.

CHAPTER XIX.

ELOINE TERREN CONSIDERS THE PROMISES OF TANTON AND IS MUCH SURPRISED TO MEET ONDELL URMODEN.

Eloine was surprised at the words of Tanton and more so at his sudden leave-taking. She was alone in the world in very truth. Tanton had told her what he intended to do. He would present her to Gerand with his compliments. She and her ill born might go whither, he cared not a whit, she had, once upon a time, made an outcast of herself and it seemed that nothing could arrest her in the fulfillment of her chosen fate. She deserved this, she had merited it, because in the erring footsteps of youth, she had tripped therein.

Why was it so? Was not this high civilization in which she lived and was not forgiveness and sisterhood and brotherhood preached on every housetop? Why was she an outcast? Better had it been for her, had she lived in a more primitive age and in a country of less sham morality, the unnatural person of this day turned from her with a simulated loathing and fastened yet deeper, at every opportunity, the chains of slavery upon her. Try as she would, she met men who were willing to toy with her with the dark of the moon behind them, but everywhere she went, though her secret was hers, she felt that the discovery must

come, and that degradation must follow that discovery and she restrained herself in the abjection of the slave, because of the shame that would inevitably come upon her.

Not that she believed herself to be worse than innumerable others, on the contrary, her sufferings had chastened her soul and worn her of ardent passion and like the low woman of the streets, she might be nearer to heaven than they who masqueraded in finery at the cushioned altars. For an hour, Eloine Terren sat there in a dazed frame of mind and tried to think out to its legitimate conclusion this thing that had come upon her. Life was so brief, so uncertain of tenure, so little it held every day, so vacant were the hopes of future joy, that she wondered that one would patiently toil on to the end of it. To her it had been a crown of thorns and though struggling in dim hope and under fluent promises all this time, now had come the revelation of it all,—she was an outcast, she had, once upon a time, gone into voluntary exile, she had, cried out in the hours of her loneliness to be taken back, she had come to the full realization that they who entered there had indeed left hope behind.

This then, was the fate to which Tanton had finally left her. To be cast off and to be traded like a horse, to be given away to some handy friend,—some fellow conspirator,—the whole of it was worthy of him. She might have expected it. She had been duped and cajoled until patience had ceased. She had been a fool too long,—she had waited and waited, alternately believing and doubting, until now it seemed that she had

come to the wall. No,—he could not be so cruel as this. He was but in a bad temper and to-morrow he would not cast her off. Yes? To-morrow would be the same as other days, He meant what he said and at last it impelled its truth upon her. This time Tanton had not lied. She ought to have killed him long since, he merited a terrible revenge at her hands, she had been his steadfast friend in everything, she had helped him with her slender means when he was at school, she had perjured herself for him, she had gone down-to hades with him.

Was there then no redress? Must she leave the country and while trying to forget him, struggle in poverty to support his child? Could she do it? What would it avail her to kill him, indeed what availed anything, other than to go away and forget him and perhaps, sometime, forgive him.

It was evident that she was superior to Tanton's bargaining, she scorned to be put away into the tender arms of the willing Gerand,—she liked Gerand somewhat and esteemed him. She did not know that he was base enough to be the pigeon for Tanton. On his own merits and had she been less leprous, she might have considered him, but in the place and stead of Tanton, he was not other to her, than a contemptible, low fellow. She did not know that, in truth, Gerand had no idea of being pigeon for Tanton, but that, for himself, he loved her some and had more nobility of character than Tanton was likely to acquire in several incarnations. Had she been able to penetrate the cynical smile of the daredevil Gerand and to read his

inmost nature, her feelings might have been different. Gerand, to his credit, be it recorded, adhered rigidly to his beliefs respecting women and would have been willing to have taken her and thrown around her the pale of decency and the safeguards that he esteemed so essential to woman's welfare and woe betide Tanton, or any other man who might try conclusions with him on that score. Gerand would not have hesitated a second to have aerated their brains through buckshot punctures. But she did not know this and so it is ever that men and women carry their secrets about and two may live beside each other many years and fail of knowing the good of their companion soul.

So Eloine Terren rode on dejectedly, not daring to kill herself, because one of tender years looked solely to her for sustenance, not daring to kill her seducer, because that would mean punishment,—and for the young might be the same as death, she had no recourse other than to go away and somewhere under the sun, begin again.

As she neared the Mansion, she looked upon it and sighed that one so base and so untrue, dwelt therein. She would go to him and kneel and beg once more? No. Must she yet humble herself? No. The time had come for retribution, but how it was to come she did not know. She felt that justice must come sooner or later to us all and it impressed her plainly that Tanton had not far to go,—somehow, she knew that some power walked behind him and waited for the moment to give him his deserts.

“The time has come! The hour of retribution! The

guilty have been searched out!" Eloine almost shrieked out these words, hardly knowing what she said. At that moment, one stepped into the road boldly,—a heavy man,—a commanding man,—not for his height or for his strength of great limb,—the moon shone upon him with full force, and he looked the fair picture of a king. He raised his hand and she stopped, not in fear, for utter abandon filled her, what he might do to her, little disturbed her.

"Has the hour come?" he asked in a resonant voice, "Eloine Terren, my witness and my accuser, has it come?"

And yet, in that moment Eloine Terren felt a great terror. It was Ondell Urmoden and well she knew the voice and the man behind it. No man ever held his own before him. A gentleman who might kill, a man quick to revenge, had he discovered it all and come to demand the martyr's crown? She was too terrified to answer him.

Ondell had been following the lady and he was satisfied as to her identity. A thought struck him that women had always been his truest friends, barring a single exception, that in despite his gloominess and haughtiness, he had always a peculiar fascination for them and that Eloine Terren might be glad to favor him. But how to approach her was another matter, until her exclamation had prompted him to stand before her in his dramatic gesture and fairly freeze the marrow in her bones.

The effect had been well divined, it was overpowering.

"You need not be alarmed at me, my dear friend, I hold nothing against you, you are a friend of Tanton and he is my friend. I would talk with you and have you enlisted in my cause."

"Where do you come from?" she asked.

"From the penitentiary, as you know. I have escaped and I wish concealment in my house. I wish to arouse my servants, I do not wish to apprise Tanton of it, until some days are passed, Miss Eloine, you will not betray me? Will you not befriend me? You may some day need a friend, Eloine, you have a woman's heart, can you sympathize with me?" The voice was irresistibly eloquent and tender.

"Ondell Urmoden, you can trust me. Come aside,—we must go to the arborium, or some place other than here, Tanton might pass back or some one might come. We will talk it over and of me, you may be assured. I have kept my secrets well and I can keep yours."

When they had come to the arborium and seated themselves in almost the identical place, where some time before, the crime had been committed, the two talked in a low earnest voice for a long time. The hour was about eleven, but they minded it not.

"Tanton has discharged Androche?" queried Ondell in surprise.

"And all the others. There is no one with him but Gerand."

"Why all this?"

"Tanton wants your property. He is not your friend. He is an enemy."

“My God, what am I to do?”

“Watch your opportunity and get into the cave you have spoken of and I will provide you with food and information. I am there every day. He,—the base Tanton, has use for me, you see what I am,—low,—too low to be a friend to a gentleman like you,—”

“No, indeed, you are the best of friends and through me, God willing, you shall come to better things. Tanton has wronged you, has he? He is that kind of a man is he? Miss Terren, I have heard in the last half hour more of my fellow men than I ever heard before. I am untutored in their ways and they have deceived me. I am wiser than I was some hours ago.”

Eloine was on the point of telling him of his innocence of the murder of Sondalere,—no,—she must not,—that would involve Tanton and of Tanton, there lingered yet a faint hope.

“Tanton has wronged you, has he? He shall right that wrong. By God, he will marry you.”

“He will not, friend Ondell, he will put it off and if you insist he will betray you or he will kill you. You must not trust him, I am compelled to trust him somewhat for the sake of my child. I must pander to him while he wishes me to give myself in double perfidy to Gerand. Not satisfied with my ruin, he would have another share it with him.”

“Why, he is very generous, the cur and hound. Miss Terren, I am so bewildered with all this,— and in my present situation I hardly know what to do.”

“Let us be going, that is the thing to do. You must be safe first and the wrongs of weak women can be

attended to to-morrow. Perhaps you may be able to persuade Tanton, perhaps you may find some other way, but I pray you be not hasty, the situation is critical. I have my school and can, out of my means, assist you and you must learn from me a little of that great patience that has come upon me with much suffering."

"Why, my dear girl,—God bless you,—but, indeed, I need not your slender means. I will prepare you a check as soon as I can, whatever you wish,—thousands if necessary and we shall not want. It is not money,—money I have more than I can spend, my good father had it from his father, we have money, never fear, I need now only that friendship and loyalty that all the money of the world cannot purchase."

"That you have for the asking."

Eloine left her horse at the arborium and followed Ondell around the hill. She knew the secret entrance as well as he did, but she thought it best to be there so that in case Gerand was around she might attract his attention to another part of the house.

"Listen!"

"Get aside," whispered Eloine, "it is Tanton, he comes this way" and the two stepped into the dense shadow under the cliff. Tanton rode up as close as he could and dismounted. Then he toiled up the hill, carrying something. The moon was in resplendent orb and what he did could be seen plainly. He was now opposite to them and but a few paces away.

There came a small, stifled cry from the bundle that he carried in his arm and Ondell bent forward, while

Eloine grasped his arm. He heard no more, but that one faint cry was that of a voice that Eloine knew. Tanton went on up the steep trail and entered the stone walled courtyard of the Mansion. Until he did so, it was not safe to speak. Then it was Eloine who broke the stillness.

"It was the voice of little Ondellette!"

"Who?"

"The child of Dolee."

"The child of Dolee?"

"Yes, she has a young child."

"And named it so?"

"Yes, she remembered you."

A great light had burst upon Ondell. She remembered him, she loved him after all, she named her only-born for him, and yet another truth came to him.

"Do you know why he kidnaps the child?"

"No, I know only that he is up to some more of his deviltry."

"He has a magnet wherewith to draw the mother. She would give the ransom of a king for any child of hers, that he knows. He wants not money, neither does he want its feeble life, he wants an unwilling mother."

"That is why he wants me to go to Gerand. He is a serpent and the deepest curse of woman be upon him!"

"Yes, some men are criminals and thieves, others are bankers and landlords. One gets gain by force and stealth, the other by force and wealth. They do say that the tradesman has virtue and the other has

vice, that the virtuous shall endure and the vicious perish. Men who read character, say that the criminal has a kink that stamps him not only with cleverness and a sort of ferocious cautel, but also a recklessness that entraps him after the act. Our friend is perhaps drunk with violence."

"Is this really a time for preaching?" asked Eloine."

"I beg your pardon, Miss. Now what's to be done?"

"We will return to the arborium and I will wait there while you ride to the home of Dolee and inform her of what has happened,—no,—that will not do,—you might be discovered. You will wait here and I will go to her. We will confront this villain and you will not be with us, for in that moment the desperation of Tanton will find vent somewhere."

"No,—I will go. Capture or not, the hour has come for me to buckle on the armor of manhood and stand forth a champion. This man must be put down. I will bring her here and she will put upon him the ineffaceable curse of a mother,—and then,—I will kill him like a dog. You have promised to keep my secret,—keep two of them for me. If I am redhanded in one, I may as well answer for two, what's done is done and by God, at one stroke I wipe off the slate!"

"Ondell!"

"No, you shall not prevent me! I will go!"

"Ondell!"

But Ondell had leaped into the sidesaddle and he heard not her cry after him. She wanted to lighten

his heart for the journey and soothe his anger, so that Tanton might not come to harm,—she could not bring herself to that. She believed that when he was confronted by his evil deeds that he would be contrite and that for his own sake he would not betray Ondell. If he dared to do so, she would betray him, come what might.

CHAPTER XX.

ONDELL RIDES AT MIDNIGHT TO THE HOME OF DOLEE
AND QUARRELS WITH HIMSELF ABOUT THE ILLU-
SIONS OF UNCONSCIOUS CEREBRATION.

Ondell rode swiftly and the scene around him, in the brilliant moonlight, was that of tall trees with bare branches, sycamores, oaks, hickories and all the trees of a mid-temperate clime. Leaf by leaf had fallen, until each seemed to stand alone and ghostly. The country around hung on the brow of numb and dying autumn and a spell of dreamy contemplation came upon him. He seemed to be within the welcome shades of paradise, after a journey through hades. So he rode through the wildern woods, by the old water mill, by the brook that flowed evermore down hill and dale. Here the white hued sycamores stood in their cold, saintly majesty in the low valleys between the hills, here the willow hung far out over the spring-dropt waters of the little river and anon the limestone cliffs, where the stream had eroded for itself a pathway through the hills, gave variety to the reposeful scene. So he fell to dreaming of a paradise, though he had, ever present, the thought that he was a fugitive and that his dream must soon end. So he rode easily and swiftly on through this garden almost wholly sacred

to the riot of nature, a place untouched by civilization, a spot in the Amerindian wilds, where for the present, he was safe from pursuit, and the balm of gentle autumn rested upon him like a benediction.

He breathed the infinite beauty of the hills and the wonderful peace of the valleys and the silence of the place gave him a moment where he could pause and introspect and commune with himself. While in this reverie he heard a faint ticking noise, such as once before, in the silence of his chamber and in an hour of great anguish he had heard. It was as if something made a tic-au-tac against the hog hide covered saddle horn. He took out his knife, rather, it was the handy knife of Philleo that he had found in the trousers pocket, and replied. The sound was answered, but the sense of it was not intelligible to him. He slowed his pace and tried again, but did not succeed any better. Then it ceased entirely. "No use to try to nail down a ghost," he said, half aloud, "I have always hoped to be classed as a man of large comprehension, if I believe this curious thing, I shall never be other than a fool. Oh, well, I have often made a fool of myself and this would not be a fugitive effort. If there is anything beyond the earthly pralaya, I would like to know it. Possibly, I am like the rest of the world, that, in the face of stacks of proof, will not believe this thing."

NOTE.—Amerindian. A denotive term for American-Indian countries.

NOTE.—Pralaya. Soul slumber.

As he rode on, subject to weariness, conflict of emotion and fear as to the possible outcome of it all, it seemed to him that it was a dangerous hour, one wherein irritation might become rage, fear become terror, or calm affection a transporting passion. The hour seemed pregnant with some dense power, something that might lead his mind into a strange retreat, wherein a little thing might become the foundation of a fixed illusion. What form of brain lesion might be involved in this he did not know, that would be a nut to crack at leisure. But he was happy in his reverie. The hachisch might be a delusion, it served him well, nerved him to be cold in the excitement of the hour, the landscape served to attract his thoughts from the monotony of impression and from a fixation of attention, which, at that time, was a danger to him, because he wandered near the shores of human mental wreck.

His thoughts then reverted to the subject that had so often intruded itself upon him, the possibility of spiritism, the step beyond hypnosis, the steps from expectant attention to profound coma, the riddle of it all,—and then again a gleam of sense would dispel the mists of imagination, only to come again and again, as one that had grown up in the midst of magnetic mysteries, had inherited a bent for metaphysical studies, had a neurasthenic disease towards them and yet without being in the least diseased or abnormal Ondell Urmoden was a pattern of many brains who yearn after the unknowable and seek to delve into its mysteries, but without being offensive as he did so. It was the greatest, the profoundest and the most scien-

tific thing in the world and as such it was for one of his order of intellect to peer into and to cast a dim light therein and then to shake his head and declare that it was unfathomable.

Possibly, thought he, intermittent life is not an inconsistent theory. It seemed that there might be periods of returning strength, that of gestation to puberty or formative period of body, from that to the period of development of reason and emotion, or formative period of the mind, from that to imagination and creativeness or of the psychic mind, from that to spirituality and exact science or period of practicality, from that to period of will power and conservation of energies and powers, and then to a sixth period of mental and physical slumber.

He had thus divided his life into six fifteen-year periods, but he had not wholly satisfied himself that the last period meant wholly breaking away from life,—science or no science, it did not seem to be a rational conclusion.

He was half inclined to laugh at himself for getting so far into deep water but he could not find it in his heart to do so. His poor self was arguing the greatest question that man has to solve and it was no time for irreverence. After all, he concluded, it may be but a picture, an astral semblance and some claim to recognize it, I do not, therein, I may be like the world, stacks of proof and yet no proof.

“Ah, earthly ties are most binding,” said the philosopher, “for their country, men forsake their families and seek death, but for patriotism towards God, to

whom all countries are dearer possessions, they forsake nothing. That is where religion fails to impress me. No man suicides for the love of good or even gives a dollar, except the entirely superfluous one. The love of God ought to be greater than that of country, but there is where religion fixes nothing upon me. The spiritual kingdom is not of sensual affiliations, says one,—earth life is a thing of hell, says another, the greatest spirit that ever visited the earth was crucified because he taught the people to forsake their earth ties for him,—I cannot follow that. Religion is to me, as of old, a cause for the wrath of the people. My earthly brother and sister I will not forsake, though our mutual ties have been generated by the processes of sin and though we all go to perdition together.

Here I am, plowing around in a mass of imaginary science, I think of a unity between God and Nature, I think that my soul is a collective thing of the sum of my brain forces, that life is wholly in the cell, that my immortal self is bound up in special brain areas, that the destruction of the areas means destruction of that much soul, that my ego grows in childhood and youth and decays with senile degeneration and I find myself in a mass of contradiction that I know not how to get out of.

Having come to the belief that there is no after life, I try to strengthen the awful possibility that there is not, and that if there is not, there is no use in my being in the least a decent man, with the belief, that the advantage of society, that is, of associated individuals,—is to have right living and right thinking and

needs not any anchor of faith, pshaw, it is impossible. The duty of each individual to the body of associated individuals need not trouble me and it will not seriously trouble me either.

Then, I am confronted with the phenomena of the supernatural and am so impressed with an intuition that a spirit am I, whose body is a garment merely and that the wrecking of any part of it is not a loss of soul function, that I begin to pity the man that does not believe it. I rejoice then that I am an atom of an immortal existence and a part of an infinite plan. The next moment I change my mind again, because that noble moment of exaltation does not agree with the demonstrations of evolution. My thoughts have been come to that phase from which I would, if I could, turn back and with sadness and fear hold to it that I am a digit of humanity, moving on without guide or place of final ending, without hope and with darkness around me, incarnation, re-incarnation, God knows, I do not, but if it ever comes to me, that year will I keep as my anno santo."

He neared the home of Dolee now and it was time to check his keen, turbulent thoughts, that after all, profited him nothing. He had studied all these things thoroughly with the lights of science and not with the lights of grace and there was no end to it all. He was a great thinker and consequently, it appeared that he was a great fool. He brought himself misery and unrest. Life was not practical, it was gloomy, irrelevant, it lacked humor and lightheartedness, it lacked the balm of sweet forgetfulness, it lacked the happiness

of the dog, because it held the intellect of the devil. Then, forsooth, he had done with it and he would plow the furrow and gather in the walnuts and pick the bountiful hazel brush and in the spring go out for the purple huckleberry and let the problems go to sheol.

Ondell now stopped and tied his horse. He was within a hundred yards of her house and he knew that if he rode up to the gate he would attract attention and that he did not wish to do.

Even while he jerked at the stubborn halter that would not give itself into a satisfactory knot, one had walked upon him on rubbers, so to speak, for he heard her not.

When he turned, after a moment and looked into the white, delicate face of Dolee, his heart fairly leaped in his throat and she was so surprised that she barely restrained a cry.

“Ondell?” she asked, as if in doubt whether it was he or his alter ego.

“Yes, hush! I come for you. Have you missed your,—”

“Yes, yes, all the men on the place are scouring the woods for her. Is she safe? Can you tell me anything? For God’s sake, Ondell, tell me!”

“Have patience. The child is well and not likely to come to harm.”

“For God’s sake, Ondell, take me to her at once.”

“Would you trust me, Dolee?”

“Trust you? To the end of the earth.”

"But I am said to have killed your husband, might I not kill you?"

"Ondell, ! Not you. You are too noble, you never killed anyone."

"But I stand convicted. I am a fugitive from the penitentiary now. I did not intend to come to you. But I saw a dastardly deed and I risked a chance of capture to come to you."

"How noble you are!"

"Not at all. If I deprived you of your liege lord, it is my duty to do you any favor that I can in atonement. You will take it as such, will you not?"

"Ondell, I don't believe it! You have not done this thing!"

"Oh, I suppose I have. I don't see how else it could have happened. Of course it was an accident, I certainly did not mean to deprive you of your husband, Dolee, I could not be so base as that, mean revenge has no part in me, we had some words and all that followed is not precisely clear. They say that I have the muscle of the ox and that I broke a blood vessel in his brain. It has happened before, it might have happened. I trust, however, that you will not harbor ill against me. Once you believed in me."

"Yes, and I believe in you now."

"And you made me happy for a brief time, because I loved,—oh, how I loved you and worshiped you, though silently and even moodily, Dolee, my heart was pure gold."

"Yes, but my dear Ondell," and there was a sweet tenderness in the caressing words, "we will go over

that again to-morrow. Take me to my child to-night. Listen, the bell of midnight rings and the searchers are to return here for news. It is the signal, you will tell them, tell the first one that comes and we will ride together, Ondell, and loose no time."

"Oh, have patience. I've had to have lots of it. You will await the men and see them alone. You forget. I am wanted. I cannot trust any one. I took great chances, like the fool that I am, to trust myself to you."

"Ondell!"

"You may tell them that you have received warning that your Ondellette——"

"Ondell! How came you to know her name?"

"No matter. I thank you for the gift of a Godfathership, we'll discuss that later, as you said. Tell them that she has been kidnapped and that there is no danger to her and that they must be satisfied until your return."

"Yes, my friend."

"And, Dolee."

"Yes, Ondell."

"Have them to saddle a good horse for you, it is rough walking over the rutty road."

"Yes, my friend, I will go now and attend to it."

"And, Dolee."

"Yes, my good friend."

"Don't tell them I'm here, or my name will be mud."

"Ondell, you must not give yourself such names as that."

"Oh, well, I'm a believer in the expressive new-

comers of language. By the way, another favor. Bring me a decent saddle. I've struggled along on this side-saddle and it has given me a nightmare of the spirit. I have been to Hindoostan with this thing to-night."

"How come you by a side-saddle?"

"We'll discuss that to-morrow, as you said. I will go with you and get the saddle, you can get ready in the meantime. Will you permit me to walk with you?"

"How provoking you are!" she said, "we must hurry, I am ever so impatient."

"Have patience, Dolee," Ondell walked close to her and presently slipped his arm in hers. It reminded him of old times and he might have one pleasure more before he went into exile. He felt that he could not remain in this country, that the cavern would not be large enough to hold him.

Tanton had come before him twice this night and under such bad aspects that he could no longer trust him in anything. The man was steeped in crime, he had an ungenerous, a selfish disposition; he hated all his fellow men, yet there was a soothing beauty in his manner and there were traits in his character that made him lovable in many respects. He could not hate Tanton, he rather pitied him. He pitied the prostitution of his gifts, of his personal beauty and of the exquisite power of his tongue. He pitied him because he had the dense shadow that goes with the light. He lacked moral perceptiveness and he could not alto-

gether help it. That was the philosopher's opinion and it came from the heart of one who, despite his cynicism, believed in the brotherhood of man,—even if the fatherhood of God seemed to be a chimera of faith.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MOTHER'S PREMONITION CAUSES A DESPERATE RIDE
TO THE MANSION OF A THOUSAND STAIRS TO WIT-
NESS A CATASTROPHE.

"God sent you to me," said Dolee as they rode along the rutty road, where the moon shone brightly and the trees were ghostly and bare.

"Woman's weakness is religion," he answered carelessly, for he had other thoughts now. What to do with himself after this was over, was a perplexing question. Tanton would surely reveal him for his part in this and how could he dispossess him?

"You are yet a scoffer, Ondell," she replied. Her companion was a man of manner somewhat winning, a clear cut face, a restless, brilliant hazel eye, a graceful, though heavy figure, a calm, cold demeanor, a hand small and shapely, a foot like an Apollo and a mind in a whirl of skepticism, such was Ondell. Dark curly hair clustered around his temples and in the moonlight she seemed again pierced by the lovelight of his eyes. A fierce feeling then came into her soul, alternately it seemed like a burning and a throbbing of love and of hatred, she felt allured by a wild sense of amusement. An unreasonable, a contradictory human heart was hers, yet from the warm throbbing within her, came an inexpressible sweetness and the delight-

ful sensation made her silent and pensive. Then anon a longing, restless expectancy grew within her and Ondell said something,—so it seemed to her,—a voice more plaintive and tender than before, but she did not catch it.

“What did you say, my friend?”

“Nothing, I did not speak.”

“How strange! Why, I hear music!”

“Aha, that is more of it. A celestial cavatine comes to your sympanthum. Nature sings her own sweet music, an autumn breeze upon an autumn’s forest, often I hear it, the humming of the bee, the chirping of the katydid and the falcon voice of the nightingale.”

“No, it was not like that, it was ethereal, dreamlike.”

“Ah, yes, a variety. It seems to tell of a life of roses, riches, love and wine, the moon’s pale lurid light, the silken zephyr that bestirs the brown-hued leaves, something ethereal that had come when the low winds softly sigh, oh, it is a dream music, there’s nothing in it, I’ve thought it all out.”

“No, it was more than that, it was so strange and so weird, so deathlike and it fills me with fear.”

“Pshaw, it is hysteria, nothing more, I’ve thought it all out. It charms you and you listen to the entrancing voices and you shall be cast out upon the bleak rocks, you make men’s hearts cry out in loneliness. Could one give you, my dear friend, so precious a thing as a human heart, then indeed, would a strange, warm

NOTE.—*Sympanthum*. The ear of the soul.

feeling sweep into your breast, but you have not that and none can give it to you."

"Ondell, you wrong me. I have a human heart, infinitely tender."

"Pshaw! You have now, under the peculiar surroundings a prayerful song for the safety of your child,—when the danger is passed,—to-morrow,—you will coquette again."

"Ondell, I am different now. Life has brought its unfoldment and its wisdom, I know you better now than I ever could have known you had not all this come to pass."

"Yes, my friend, you have drifted somewhat towards the shores unknown,—drifted amid strange wrecks and reefs, desolation is there, my dear, and it is all a wonderful mystery. To-morrow, you will forget again."

"No, I shall never again forget. I erred, I did wrong, forgive me!"

"Undoubtedly. It has been a passing hour of waiting, and oh, so deucedly pleasant. Meanwhile our friend Tanton has captured the booby prize."

"Tanton? My God, has Tanton done this thing?"

"Aye, so he has. I looked at him to-night and I saw lines deep and eloquent on his face, his hair whitens even in his youth, his step is less manly and yet Dolee he loves you and he would have you. He has the babe already, why not you? Go to him and make him happy, that is nearer to your nature than anything that I know of," Ondell, strange to say, was bitterly sarcastic and it ill befit the surroundings.

Dolee covered her face and sobbed.

"My dear, I did not mean to offend you. Gracious, one would suppose that you loved only me."

"Ondell, I love only you. I have never loved any one but you."

"Then indeed, am I in sorrow, for after the hour is past, I must go hence and seek a land where the laws of the Amerindian commonwealth cannot poach upon me. I must go to-night,—as far as I can. Tanton will not thank me for this."

"Ondell! Ondell!" she exclaimed suddenly, "did you see that? My God, the house is falling! We must ride for life, Ondell, we must go as swiftly as we can, something awful is going to happen!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I had a vision!"

"What! You getting them too? Don't jest so, I'm ticklish on that subject."

"Ondell, we must go faster. My eyes travel over the hills. Earth is disturbed, a calamity awaits us,—for God's sake,—Ondell!"

Then came to Ondell a consciousness of wildered haste, the veins swelled out on his body and a sensation altogether new and strange seized him. He caught that feeling of terrible urgency.

"You are right, Dolee, something is wrong somewhere." He whipped up each horse and then began the most exciting and desperate ride of his life. Nor was his extreme nervous tension in the least relieved as he came upon a small prominence overlooking the

valley, from which he could see in the distance the Mansion of a Thousand Stairs.

"There is gushing of the light, something is wrong there, there is an over supply of gases, you are right, something is wrong."

His companion answered not, but peered ahead and bent low and galloped wildly,—intensely concentrated on the making of headway. Ondell looked at her for a moment,—her white face had an unnatural whiteness, the eyes fairly shone, he knew not what new obsession this was, but it was more force of an intangible kind than had ever been able to fasten itself upon him before.

He even fancied that the air around him was pervaded with some dim aura, even the horses seemed to catch the unnatural inspiration and they skimmed along easily and without labored breath. Ondell had time to think that these were better horses than he ever owned, though he lived in the land where the swift horse thrived.

It seemed to him that this was one of those hours that are lived but once in a lifetime and whereon hung the destinies of many days.

And it was such an intense hour as he might never forget,—in other years when happier moments had come to him, when the storms of youth had ceased to disturb,—he might remember this desperate ride beyond the hour of midnight in the land of Gascony.

Now they rode even harder and the horses began to show signs of being winded, they prespired profusely, the white foam gathered on their flanks and necks.

"Ride slower, our horses will drop," said Ondell, but the woman heard him not for she bent still lower and rode on for a moment ahead of him in that awful desperation that had come upon her. The next moment he had caught up with her and again they rode neck and neck and little he cared now whether or not they dropped in their tracks. Now they rounded out the valleys like birds that skimmed the low heavens,—they passed beyond the mill stream,—up into the little forest,—up the steep rock-path that lead to the gloomy mansion.

The light continued to send forth strange spouts of flame and through the trees occasionally, Ondell fancied that he saw the outlines of a man walking on the flat roof and using an axe or some heavy instrument.

"It is Tanton, he seeks to burst the gaspipe. The house is filled, the place is smothering him, he seeks to open the greater pipe, he cannot do it!" Ondell spoke aloud but his companion heeded him not. The horses now went slower perforce, they reared with wild pesade at times, picking their rocky way and then at last they stood upon the little plateau and in the near distance rose majestically the mansion. But they stopped here. The ground beneath them heaved and rocked as if in earthquake.

They were unable to proceed. Dolee turned and her ghastly, beseeching face was as the face of the dead. She looked pleadingly at her companion,—the hour had come when the impassiveness of that companion would be in excellent stead.

"Get down!" he said, suiting the action to the word.
"Take my arm and under no circumstances let go."

Tanton could now be seen plainly, the light of moon and waning morn, though dim, reached him and it could be discerned that he struck desperately at the pipe that would not yield.

Ondell and Dolee toiled on up the broken rocks, hand over hand, as swiftly as they could. The greatest of excitement filled them. The rocks were sore disturbed, the earth seemed verily to ferment. They could not go further then and the great drops of sweat stood out upon Ondell as he realized that he was too late. The convulsion that had come upon the place had already so disturbed the ways and uprooted the trees and made such a scene of desolation that it was useless to attempt to pass it.

Dolee had realized this now and as Ondell turned to her she was prepared for the worst.

"Dolee, I'm afraid we cannot make it. The house is ruined, it will be worth our lives to venture farther. We might go around the hill and try the other passageway, though it is rougher and steeper than this. No, it is useless. He is hemmed in and cannot get out. He has the child with him!"

Dolee sank into a deadly swoon and Ondell picked up the burden and weakly found his way down the rocking hill until he came to the little plateau or flat edge of the hill. There he felt safe enough to pause and turn back to view the scene of destruction before him.

Nothing that he had ever seen equalled the appalling

grandeur of this night's calamity. He felt that the usefulness of his home was gone. It would be a wreck and a ruin about which, still more strange legends might cluster, he would see the end of it and altogether he was not sorry, only that it deprived him of a refuge from the minions of the law.

Then Dolee seemed to revive and presently she was able to stand again and look with tearless, straining eyes upon the scene before her.

Now Tanton seemed to leave the roof as if in frenzy of fear and go down to the house. Presently he appeared again and once more began his desperate fight for life. He believed that if he could break the greater pipe that the escape of the natural gas would be so great that it would relieve the pressure below and give him a chance to escape. He was correct in his surmise and if ever man labored with desperation in every blow, it was Tanton in the morning hour of this strange day.

Suddenly then, the lamp went out and darkness filled the place. Ondell did not believe that it was so dark, everything had been so light around him, he attributed it to the moonlight, he had in his excitement forgotten all about the great beacon.

Then Tanton struck a match and in the explosion that followed, he was hurled off his feet but the beacon burned again with great spouting gusts of flame and Tanton arose and hurriedly threw off his burning coat. Ondell admired his great bravery in that act,—under awful circumstances, his presence of mind had not forsaken him.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CATASTROPHE ENDS IN THE WRECK OF THE MANSION, THE DEATH OF TANTON AND A THRILLING RESCUE BY ELOINE.

Ondell turned for a moment to look at his companion. She stood by his side, white and immovable as marble. She looked as one who could not weep or moan or think in the agony that was rending her heart, as she stood there, trying to understand what death meant.

The invisible spirit, of things from the deep fountains of the soul seemed to be around them then, and they could not read the mysteries. On her face was an expression so lifeless, so calm and numb, that it impressed him with a yet intenser terror. If she were dead, she would be like this and if she were dead, then life would be naught to him. But she was not dead, the resemblance merely, yet startled him and he realized the depth of yearning and the mastery of his love, as under no other circumstances he could have awakened to it.

Then his staring eyes wandered again to the tragedy that was enacting before him and he trembled for the wretch in its midst. It was not that of a soul that went out into a glorified paradise with tender chant of mercy, nor yet, one that resisted not as a chill hand

fell on his brow in the graying of the world, one strong in flesh and great in desire, struggled there, with might and main, against a pitiless executioner and another looked on with the sternness of justice on her countenance.

The light of the beacon now blazed with a greater splendor than it had ever known so that the hill that rose up before them was light as the mid-day and the rocking and swaying of it seemed to be stayed. Yet, the two spellbound spectators could not have gone forward even if they had desired to do so, for terror fixed them in their places and life and death hung in the balance. Ondell gazed upon the scene before him as one fascinated and his mind was so involved in all this, that he had no longer power to think of it.

In this place, he had grown to manhood, in this place, his mind had come to all its peculiarities, here, he had been haunted by the mysteries, here, he had dreamed of love and here, also, he had spent hours of loneliness and of sorrow, because his dreams had not come true,—because a great riddle, that by the deepest power of his mind, he had tried to solve, had brought him but unrest, because, he was a poor creature of doubt that had become unhappy in the keenness of his intellect, there was such a thing as a sensation of intelligence and it had wearied his brain.

As he thought of all these things, for in the momentary calmness that had come upon the scene before him, his turbulent brain had set to racking, he became agitated and that dim insanity, or that, fixation of attention that led to it, brooded within him and seemed

to have almost come to its climax, uncertainty overcame him then, so that he saw but vaguely what was passing, he seemed as if transported to another state of existence, yet, he resolutely forced himself to remember that this was not a picture from some secret place in hell, that it was but a scene from one of earth's many calamities and that it would soon pass away.

Then his mind cleared again and he wondered at the intellectual fainting that had passed. He could see Tanton, his companion's arm reposed in his, surely, he stood in the midst of a dream and all as unreal as a dream. There were others then that he saw walking beside Tanton on the roof of the house, indeed, were not these familiar faces and forms that he had often seen in Cavern Hall, when the deep, lingering trance had fallen upon him? Had their day of freedom come also? He shook himself, pulled his hair to make sure that he had his senses, his companion tugged at his sleeve and looked at him inquiringly. He roused himself then, for he must not, at this critical moment give way to any weakness.

The turbulence of the earth having come to rest, Tanton too, had ceased his desperate struggle and stood still and then folded his hands across his breast. Ondell wondered if he saw the ghostly forms that stole about him, did Dolee see them? Undoubtedly they must see them and he fell to wondering what they thought of them. Now, it seemed that a new and different influence had come upon them all and everything around them assumed a weird, mysterious color like that of a dim, phosphorescent shadow and so lurid

and ghastly a hue it made, that Ondell grew restless and alarmed. Tanton no longer stood still with folded arms silently defying the forces of nature or of an ether world. A frightful noise now sounded and Tanton startled and fled to the centre of the roof, Ondell's limbs quaked and he had a thought to despise himself for his cowardice. Was it then true that human nature could not endure to behold all things? In the noise and momentary confusion Ondell noted that Tanton had fallen forward and he hoped that he was dead. He chided himself then for wishing him so uncharitable a thing, yet, indeed, death would be charity under such conditions.

But Tanton, after a moment, slowly arose and then walked about again as one dazed and weak. Now, the swaying and rocking of the hill commenced again and the earth seemed to break, and from the rocks and from the fissures, gases rose and filled the air with creamy vapor. He felt the smothering of the damp, yet he believed that it would not endanger him to remain there and see the enactment of the end.

He turned to his companion and she looked at him and repeated his name mechanically as though, she too, was dazed.

“Ondell!” she said, “what is this wonderful thing?”

He shook his head for answer. He comprehended it not. But this had reassured him and he felt again the sense of responsibility that had entirely forsaken him.

Tanton now came to the edge of the roof and peered down and some consciousness of his danger must have

come to him for he looked for an avenue of escape. But there was none other than to leap down into the courtyard where the rock of the outer wall were piled over in great confusion and Tanton did not think of it, he would chance it on the roof.

It appeared to Ondell that Tanton did not realize his danger, that he believed it to be some terrible convulsion, but seemed assured that the house would weather the earthquake or else he had the dogged determination to remain there and toy with death. So he felt his way along the edge of the roof and swayed back and forth with the house and while this occurred in but few seconds, it seemed to Ondell to be as many hours.

While he looked at the man on the roof in the hour of his earthly purgation, he that braved his great danger or else knew it not, he felt a sympathy for him and a hopeless sympathy, for there was nothing that he could do for him. Could he have done it, he might have rescued him and been satisfied to leave him only to the mercy of his conscience, but since nothing could be done, he yet stood by and pitied him.

What transpired in the mind of Dolee is conjectural. Whether she remembered her own child in this moment it would be difficult to say. The profound effect of the scene had unnerved her and it passed probably as some horrid nightmare before her.

Then the hill became once more calm and the watcher on the roof stood erect and held up his head. If he realized death, he had more courage than Ondell believed that he had. Yet it seemed that he must have

realized that escape was impossible, that a leap into the air meant breaking and crashing of bone and body and if it must come, let it come as it would. The stillness that had supervened boded unmistakably of the final issue. Ondell knew that, he knew that when the gas passed out and the inner pressure was gone, under the conditions in which the huge pile stood now, that it must collapse and in that event Tanton could hardly be so fortunate as to escape. Tanton seemed to know, however, that he stood better chance on the roof than anywhere else.

The time during which these several events transpired was very brief but the agony of it prolonged them immeasurably. Tanton now turned and looked down the hill where the intense white light of the beacon shone down as if to make out the man who stood by her. and it roused him for they heard his voice.

“Ha! See me die! Glory in it!” They heard the words distinctly and they saw him hold up his hands as if he held a child and they understood the pantomime.

“See me die!” shouted the frenzied man.

“Curse you! Curse you forever!” answered the woman.

She heard his mocking laugh and then he peered down as if to make out the man who stood with her. Dolee had fallen upon her knees and covered her eyes, as though she prayed upon her bitter curse and as though her anguish, she sought to hide within herself. Ondell stood closer to her and felt her head against

his knee. He saw that Tanton peered down and looked at him.

"It is I! Ondell Urmoden!" he shouted to him.

Again Tanton answered him with a mocking laugh,—he stood up then and defied them all. His manner was so unusual and so courageous that Ondell knew not what to think of him.

At this moment, one toiled painfully up the hill behind them but they did not hear her. She carefully and slowly made her way and her forehead was bathed with blood. She had undergone one of the greatest experiences of her brave and sacrificing life. When Ondell rode away, she remained about the place and when she saw that some great calamity was impending, she had gone into the house and run like one beset through its many rooms until she came to one wherein a baby lay and cried out alone. Her mission in this had been one of extreme danger for even as she ran along, the furniture of the rooms upset, the plastering fell, beams were loosened and the house creaked and rocked as if a great storm tore around it. When at last, she had, in the darkness, stumbled here and there and had found the door, she had fallen over the rocks and half way down the steep incline of the rear way, to regain the open country. Then perhaps it had been the curiosity, or the fascination of the tragedy, that had drawn her back to witness the culmination, then she had seen the two who stood midway up the hill on the little plateau and she knew that to them, her coming would mean happiness.

She came up behind them without warning and

touched Ondell on the shoulder. He turned wondering what new mystery was this and then a joyful exclamation burst from his lips.

“Eloine! Dolee! Look.”

But Eloine stooped and passed into the lap of the kneeling mother, the burden that she had rescued at so great a peril and the dazed and stricken Dolee leaped up and clasped the child and held it on high, so that the light of the great beacon might shine upon it.

Tanton saw this as she intended that he should and he answered her with so mocking a laugh, that Ondell knew then, that Tanton was a maniac and that he knew not what he did. Reason had departed from him. There was no malice in his heart, no taunt of revenge in his laughter, he was now and had been, perhaps for some time, irresponsible. Certainly, this had been an insane deed. This would not be revenge, unless indeed, the diabolical have strange notions of revenge, this was mania and so wise a philosopher as Ondell could not momentarily find it in his heart, to bear the man ill will.

“Tanton! Tanton! God forgive you!”

“Oh my God, Tanton!” shrieked Eloine, to whom the realization of the identity of the watcher on the roof, had now come in all its force, but a merciful swoon came over her and Ondell stooped to lay her down.

Then he again faced the awful scene.

“Tanton!” What he intended to say was utterly drowned in the tremendous din that followed. There

was a crashing of beams, a falling and tumbling together of masses of stone and the earth seemed to sink beneath his feet. He grasped the women by each arm and his strength was surely that of a maniac. He hurriedly pulled them back and down they went together,—down the rocky hill. He must not remain here. The rocks slipped from under his feet and the soil crumbled away as he leaped over it, carrying in each arm a helpless woman. In a moment they had regained the valley and out of breath, Ondell stopped and the women, both of them, had had so severe a shaking up, that the swoon and the daze had passed from them. As he stood there for a moment, a great convulsion shook the earth and they heard the crashing of the house and the falling together of the trees.

Then all was still and dark and they all turned and looked behind them. They seemed to look beyond into the valley of the Bourbese, where the water, like a silver thread peacefully reposed.

“The house is gone!” exclaimed Ondell.

“The hill is gone!” answered Eloine, “My God, where is Tanton?”

But no one could answer that. He had gone down with the massive wreck and even as it seemed to them, so it was. Into the domdaniel cavern below, into the blackness of the bowels of the earth, the mount and the Mansion of a Thousand Stairs, had gone down together and in the place where they had fallen, the soil of the hill and the trees of its playground had tumbled after and save for the rough wreckage, they looked across some forty acres, where once stood a mount,

beside a peaceful little river, surmounting the hill, once rested a great mansion built over the mouth of a cavern. In after years, a deep hole, half filled with water, black and awesome, could be seen here and trees grew up from its sides;—it was fenced because it was dangerous and a gloomier place was this, than the Dead Sea.

“What on earth has happened?” said Ondell, though he well knew what had happened. That which had been foretold him by his father had come to pass. And now the night of terror had also passed.

“It is morning,” said Dolee, plaintively.

“Yes, it is morning, a new day comes for us,” he answered.

“And the past is buried here,” said Eloine, “My God, have mercy upon Tanton!”

“Yes,” said Ondell, “for me, time’s greatest hour is done!”

Then the three turned sadly away and walked in the valley where the dim morning light pervaded. After walking in silence for some yards, Ondell said to Eloine:

“Will you see to it that Madam Sondalere gets home safely?”

How strange it sounded to Dolee.

“Why so?” asked Eloine.

“I must be going now. The day comes apace, the people will soon come to witness this catastrophe and the convict must to the cover of the woods. I will meet you here to-night. I wish to reward you for services, in fact, to make it easy for you, and to-

morrow I will seek some other land to dwell in exile and dream there of one awful night and of one heart that loved me and when I knew it, it was but to my bitterness, for then I must leave her forever."

Dolee threw one arm around his neck as he stood there irresolutely and she hid her face on his breast and sobbed.

"Don't go, Ondell, don't go. Don't leave me!"

"You would not see me back in the,—"

"No, she will not," interposed Eloine resolutely, "Ondell, forgive me, I was ever weak, foolish, sinful, I followed that poor, unfortunate man down to perdition and it were better for me that I had perished with him. Ondell, you are innocent, you are innocent, you did not kill Sondalere!"

"Yes, I suppose I did. I was there, my dear, so I know that I did it. I would that what you say is true, but unfortunately, I know better."

"But you are innocent! Did you not see Tanton seize the wine glass and crush it under his foot?"

"Why yes, what of it? It has never come into my mind from that hour to this."

"Poison lay in that glass, Ondell, poison swift and sure. Your timely blow had a good appearance against you. I stood at the back of the arborium and saw it all. But Ondell, you will forgive me for this, I loved him, he begged me, he promised me, I did wrong and God forgive me, I turned against you for love of Tanton,—and, oh,—I do love him!"

Eloine broke down completely. Months of waiting and watching, days of despised love, hours of resistless

conscience, moments when every known sorrow seemed upon her at once, these now had their culmination and she cried in the misery of her repentance. The awful scene that had just been enacted before her threw her emotions to the floodgate and her grief was deep and pitiful.

"Come now, my brave girl, my dear Eloine, no one loves you more than I, you must be brave, we will all of us turn back and begin a nobler life."

"I do love him!" she sobbed, "how else could it be! Have I not his son?"

"Ah?" asked Ondell with surprise and a few tears trickled down his cheek as he placed his arm around her and the other around Dolee and walked on down the valley, not caring now who came or went, nor what might betide him.

"We will bear no one ill will. Suffer his child to come to me and for the father, who in the foolish passions of the world, had gone to the limit of reason, let us cover with charity, for he knew not what he did."

Dolee clung to him as though she feared that all this was not true and that unless she held him, he might go from her. But no such thought entered his mind. The gloom,—the mystery,—the birthplace,—a thousand memories, had been buried from sight in the night and a resplendent morning had ushered in a new day.

EPIGRAPH.

Of the philosophers, each wise in his own conceit and after his own fashion,—one yet lived in the environments of the flesh, the head of a simple house, where the son of Tanton and the son of Sondalere, grew up under noble teachings, where great love, elutriated by bitter experiences, dwelt in fullness.

And though the mystery of the world of human existence deepened around him, he struggled not with the riddle, nor yet cared to think upon it, simple happiness, contentment, and in fact, spiritual ignorance, were the sole ends that he strove to attain.

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